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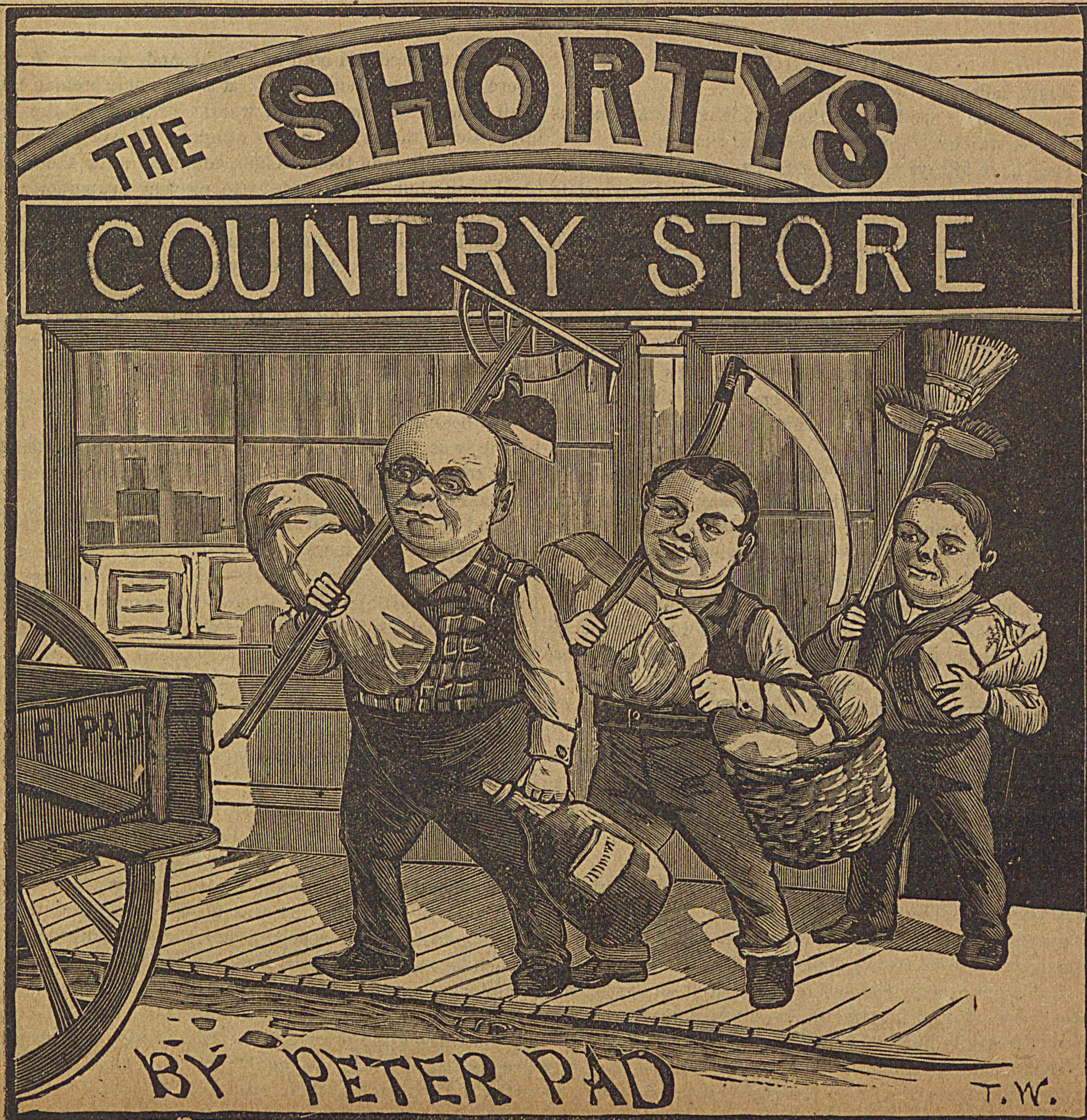
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The Shortys' Country Store.

By PETER PAD

Author of "The Shortys Out Fishing," "Sam," "The Funny Four," "Joe Junk the Whaler," "Bob Rollick, the Yankee Notion Drummer," "The Shortys Married and Settled Down," "Bob Rollick; or, What Was he Born For?" "Ebenezer Crow," "Stump; or, Little, but Oh, My!" "Chips and Chin-Chin," "Stuttering Sam," "Tommy Bounce," "Tom, Dick, and the ———," "Shorty; or, Kicked Into Good Luck," "Shorty in Search of His Dad," "Tommy Dodd," "The Shortys' Trip Around the World," "Tumbling Tim," "Boarding-School," "The Shortys Out for Fun," "The Shortys Out Gunning," "The Shortys' Farming," Etc., Etc., Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

WELL, lads, here we are again.

These Shortys are bound to keep us laughing as long as they live, which we hope will be a long time yet.

They have always been called Shorty and the Kid, and I suppose they always will be, just as we have learned to call the elder of the little men the Old Man.

You will remember their wives and children, those chips of the old blocks. And the wives, you will remember, were originally mother and two daughters, but on account of Shorty's having married the mother, and his father and son afterward marrying her two daughters, their relationship became so mixed that they hardly knew themselves. And when each of the wives bore each husband a son, that relationship became such a riddle as to be past finding out.

"However, there is ten dollars' reward for the man, woman, or lightning calculator who may best figure out that existing relationship, although the publisher refuses to become responsible for the lunatic asylum expenses which somebody will in all probability have to pay before the conundrum-solvers shall have earned the money.

And among other characters, our readers will remember that old fraud, Bedemus Dubb, who kept the village store near the Shortys' farm, Little Neck, L. I.

In this story, Mr. Dubb will figure as quite a character, if not quite a hero.

He bore an unenviable reputation, and among other things said of him was, that he was without doubt the meanest man on Long Island, which is a dreadful thing to say of anybody. But he was undoubtedly entitled to the distinction.

He kept the country store, and having no opposition in the village, he could charge what he liked, and give weight and measure to suit himself, and that was always rough on those who were obliged to deal with him.

Dubb was a noisy member of the church, of course, and was foremost in bringing sinners to repentance, which he most effectually did when they became his customers.

He was a sanctimonious old hypocrite—one of those men who loudly proclaim their honesty and justice—who in-

variably cheated you both in weight and measure if you were not looking, but who, if you *were*, would break a lath-nail in halves to make exact weight, or wait for the flies to settle on the sugar he was weighing for you, so as to take advantage of their weight, and this after the sugar had been abundantly sanded, (to prevent evaporation, he used to say to what little conscience he had.) And in measuring calico he would contrive to stretch it so as to gain at least an inch on every yard, provided you were looking at him.

And he had a young man in his employ, a boy whom he had taken to learn the business, and he was bringing him up in the way he thought he ought to go.

But this poor youngster had a tough time of it.

He belonged to the great Smith family, and his front name was Charles. A tall, honest, good-natured fellow, only too ready and willing to do all that his employer heaped upon him, and that, too, without a protest.

And he had educated him right up to the business of dealing with customers. If he ever caught him giving the least grain more than exact weight, even when the customer was looking, or full weight or measure when he was not, he would deduct it from his wages, and in this way he contrived to get his clerk-hire very cheap, for at the end of every month he had quite an array of items of this nature charged against him, and he, the honest fool, submitted to it because old Dubb told him it was all right, and were the first and most important lessons in the life of a first-class business man.

This old rascal had put the screws to the Shorty family, and came near making a fortune out of them during the first season. But the Old Man finally took a big tumble, and refused to run an account with him any longer, buying of him only what he was absolutely obliged to, and paying cash, which nearly broke the old man's heart, as much for the loss of their trade as for the outspoken assertions regarding his honesty. It was a dreadful blow to a church member, and he got as near hunk as he could by putting on the price, and cheating at weight or measure regarding anything the family might be obliged to buy, as they did the most of their trading in New York.

The Old Man had often said that he had a mind to start an opposition store, and run the old rascal out of town, and thereby hangs a tale.

But this is going ahead a little too fast.

Let us return to the Shortys, for it is early spring, and the family have scarcely thought of going to the country yet, although the Old Man had spent the whole winter nearly in reading up on farming, being determined that his second season should not see him make an ass of himself so many times as the first one had, while the boys, Shorty and the Kid, had lived through the winter about the same as they always did, taking life easy, and playing jokes on the Old Man.

But finally the old farmer, as it was his delight to be called now, concluded that, as the early bird gets the worm, so the early farmer would get the best also of the aforesaid worm. He had read so much about farming during the winter that he was just chuck full, and was anxious to get a chance to let some of it out, and at the same time get the start of his neighbors.

But of course his son and grandson were bound to guy him, as they always did.

"I am going to take a run out to the farm to-morrow if it is fair," said he, as they all sat around the family dinner-table.

"Better take a run up ter Bloomingdale," suggested his son Shorty.

"What for?" demanded the Old Man.

"An' hide in ther lunatic asylum," said the Kid.

"Goin' ter start that racket again?"

"To be sure I am. What did we buy that farm for, I'd like to know?"

"Ter have some fun with."

"An', soy, pop, we had it, didn't we?" asked the mischievous Kid, laughing.

"Yer bet we did," and then the whole family, remembering the Old Man's mishaps, joined in the laugh, the children louder than any of them.

"Goin' to have Yankee Doodle Day, pop?" asked one of the youngsters.

"Who was George Washington?" asked another, and then all three of the little rascals joined in the well-known chorus:

"First in war, first in peace,
First in the hearts of his countrymen!"

after which they beat a tatoo with their knives and forks on their plates, in spite of their mothers, who were trying hard to quiet them.

Oh, they were double-distilled chips of the old blocks, and no mistake.

"Charles Burwick, if I see any more of such conduct, yon shall leave the table and go to bed without your supper," said his mother, and the other two mothers threatened the same thing, while the fathers laughed in spite of themselves and the bad example it was setting the young hopefuls.

"And you are as much to blame as they are," said the Kid's wife, reprovingly.

"Well, ma, didn't grandpop learn it to us last Fourth of Yankee Doodle's Day?" asked the "chip."

"Well, if he did, he didn't intend it for you to recite at the table."

"And besides, you must not always do as he does," said the Old Man's wife, laughing; "for you are not made of India-rubber, as he seems to be."

"No," added Shorty; "if you follow his example you will buy improved breeds of hogs."

"And hay-loaders," added the Kid.

"And hay-unloaders, and get buried under the hay, just as your dear old grandpop did."

"Or try to run a mowing-machine when yer don't know how."

"Or plant corn an' potatoes that all run to stalks."

"Or——"

"Or have a lazy pair of sons to torment the life out of you," put in the Old Man, no longer able to have them guy him about the mishaps he made in his first year's farming without talking back to them.

"Or an old plug of a father who thinks he knows everything, and don't," said Shorty.

"Now, stop," said the Old Man's wife.

"Oh, they'd die if they couldn't chaff somebody," said the Kid's wife.

"Well, he began it."

"Nothing of the kind. I simply said that I should run out to the farm to-morrow if it was fair, and you at once began your infernal nonsense. But that shall not alter my purpose any, and if you don't want to go, you can stay here."

"I'll do with you, grandpop," said one of the "chips," and the other two were of a like obliging disposition, for they remembered all the fun they had enjoyed there the summer before.

"It is too early to go yet, Josiah," said his wife.

"I know it is. I simply said that I was going out there to see how things are getting along, and set Pat to work getting things ready for the spring work, and all this talk and nonsense has come out of that. I hope that George and Charley will not go out there at all. We should then have quiet and comfort," he added, frowning at Shorty and the Kid.

"Well, soy, who'd yer have ter run after ther doctor for yer when yer gets mashed up in yer new-fangled farmin' machines?" asked the Kid.

"Who then would build for you the revivifying cocktail when misfortune overwhelms you?" asked Shorty.

"Bah!" was his only reply.

"He is not going to have any of those patent harvesters and labor-saving machines this year—are you, Josiah?" asked his wife.

"Ahem!" and he hesitated.

"You promised me you would not," she added.

"He? He'd burst a blood-vessel if he couldn't be ahead of somebody else on new-fangled rackets. I'll bet he'll have a patent cow-milker before he has been there a month," said Shorty.

They laughed, and the Old Man winced, for to tell the truth, he actually had been examining a recently patented cow-milking machine at one of the agricultural warehouses.

So this knocked that in the head, unless he could make up his mind to stand the laugh that they would be sure to raise at his expense.

The "chips" laughed with the rest, for they loved fun

as well as their parents did, and were old enough now to understand pretty well where it came in.

And so the matter dropped for the time being, but the next day being fair, the Old Man went out to the farm, where he found their man Pat already at work doing chores and things about the place that were necessary at the opening of spring, and even before the frost is fairly out of the ground.

Of course, both Shorty and the Kid intended to go out and spend the summer on the farm, for they had their horses and yacht there, together with everything else that makes life agreeable; but they were bound to chaff and guy the Old Man all the same, as they always had.

"Hello, Pat, how are you?" was the Old Man's hearty salutation, after he had detached himself from the embrace of the big Newfoundland dog, who instantly recognized and seemed determined on kissing him.

"Ah, Mr. Burwick, is it yersilf that's there? Faith, it's glad I am ter see yees once more," said the honest Milesian, for he was much attached to him. "An' how's all the folks?"

"Oh, first-rate, thank you, Pat."

"That's good. An' Shorty an' the Kid, are they as full of divilmint as ever?"

"Oh, yes, just the same, and they always will be."

"Troth, I belave yees; but it's a foine toime they'll be afther havin' ridin' their mules when they come here," he added, laughing.

"Why so?"

"Sure, they haven't done a stroke av worruk since yees left last fall, so they haven't, an' they're as full av the divil as an egg is full av mate."

"Well, but how about mine?" asked the Old Man, anxiously.

"Och, sure, but I've used yourn nearly every day. That's all right, sur."

The Old Man said nothing, but a smile danced around his good-natured mouth. If those mules could get the best of his boys, it was more than he had ever been able to do, and he made up his mind to let them try it.

"Well, Pat, how is everything about the place?"

"As foine as feathers, sur."

"And the cows?"

"Troth, they're darlints. Wud yees belave it?"

"What?"

"Ther milk an' butther I've sould ther past winter has paid for their kapin' an' mesilf an' woife."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, an' more, too."

"And the hens?"

"Sure, they're ther greatest layers I ever seen. Ould Dubb owes yees fifty dollars or more for ther eggs I've sould him, besides those I've sent yees ter the city."

"Confound old Dubb! I wish you hadn't sold them to him. You might have sent them to the city, or sold them to somebody else. Now I shall have to take it out in trade, and probably get about one-half the amount. But I'll fix him before I am a year older!" he added, shaking his fist.

"Sure, but yees didn't tell me."

"I know it. It isn't your fault. Well, what are the farm prospects?"

"Good, I think, sur."

"Frost all out of the ground yet?"

"Very nearly, I think, sur."

"And when do you propose beginning to plow?"

"Within a few days, sur. But I'm thinkin' we shall want no manure on the ground this year," he added, with a grin.

The Old Man knew what that grin meant. He had become aware, when it was too late, that he had overdone the business of fertilizing the year before, making the ground so rich that everything grew to stalks and nothing to a head.

He had gone in full of enthusiasm and vanity, and had lost a pile of money the first year. True, just before "silking-time," his corn was even then higher than the average corn when full grown, and his potatoes looked twice as rank and full of promise as any of his neighbors' did. But there they stopped. They all went to stalks and tops, and he had to buy both corn and potatoes.

"That's all right, Pat. I think we did a trifle overdo the business last year," said he.

"Roight yees ar, sur. But it will be all roight this year. All we have ter do is ter give it a good double plowin', so as ter mix it up all roight, an' me word for it, Mr. Burwick, yer'll have ther foinest crops on Long Island ther year."

"Yes, I think so," mused Mr. Burwick.

"But yees won't be offended at me, sur?"

"What for?"

"For givin' yees a bit av advice."

"Certainly not. What is it?"

"That yees don't allow Shorty or ther Kid ter drop any seeds this year."

The old man smiled.

"Sure, they raised ther divil wid yees last year. I never tould yees av it before, but when they dropped potaties they dropped a dozen other things at ther same toime, an' it war the divil's own job I had weedin' 'em out."

"I dare say. No, they shall have nothing to do with the farming this year. We will boss the business ourselves, and I want to take in some big crops. Let them attend to their yacht and their mules—we want nothing of them. Indeed, I suspected they were to blame for nearly all my failures last year, although Peter Pad has since assured me that the reason the squashes he gave me grew as they did was because the soil was too rich. He said it was like planting them in a dung-heap."

"An' he was roight, sur. Sure, but he's a great farmer, so he is."

"Yes, and I have got some valuable points from him this winter, and next fall I hope to show him that I am quite as good a farmer as he is," said he, proudly.

"Did yees see his book?"

"Which one?"

"Ther Shortys' Farmin'."

"Oh, yes, but he never would have written it only for those rascally sons of mine. It was the same way when we went out fishing, and when we went out hunting. They make it out a big thing to Mr. Pad, and he, of course,

makes a book of it. That is his business. He has made a fortune out of us since George first started out in the world, and goodness only knows how many books and serials he has written, wherein the Shortys, as he always calls us, figure as the heroes. But I have had a long talk with Mr. Pad, and he assures me that he will never write another book on the subject of our family weaknesses."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Oh, Mr. Pad is a great man—a great farmer—but he will never hold me up to ridicule again at the suggestion of my rascally boys. No, he has assured me that he will not."

(And he won't—oh, no!)

"Troth, but them b'ys is divils?" mused Pat.

"Pat, I am sorry to say it, but if you never go further away from the truth than that, you will undoubtedly climb the Golden Stair. But they are not a bit like me—oh, no," said he, earnestly.

"Sure, I'd say so, sur," replied Pat, although his keen Irish sense showed him that the mischievous youngsters were only chips of the old block.

"Oh, dear, no, not a bit like me."

"An' ther youngsters—are they well?"

"Are they—are they well!" and the Old Man turned and walked away a little distance, and, as he walked back to where Pat stood grinning, he said: "Oh, yes, they are *very* well."

"An' ther missusses?"

"They are all well. Now, Pat, I have got a point or two from Mr. Pad regarding hogs."

"Sure, an' he ought ter know all about 'em, for he told me he had sausages for breakfast ivery day."

"Well, and you know something about hogs yourself, Pat?"

"Troth, I wur brung up among 'em in ther ould counthry, so I wur."

"Well, you just look around among the neighboring farmers, and see if you can find me a likely pair of shoats. If you can, why, just buy them and take them home. You see, I don't want them rascally boys of mine to get any more laughs on me, so I shall leave things more in your hands. See?"

"Yes, sor. Faix, they may laugh at me all they want ter; I can stand it."

"Well, don't give them too much of a pull on you, or they will laugh you bald-headed, as they have me. But you had better jump right in on the plowing and let the land lie turned up to the sun for a few days, and I will be up again in a week or so. We shall probably all be up inside of a month, for the ladies want to get at their flower-garden again."

"All roight, sur."

And after looking around awhile longer, talking to the Jersey cows and his fancy breed of hens, he returned to the depot.

But on his way he met old Bedemus, Dubb, who professed to be overjoyed at seeing him.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Burwick, what would life be were it not for our blessed religion, and the change of seasons which brings back our friends to us? I am delighted to

see you, and I trust you are really as well as you look, and that your family are all well."

"All well, thank you," said the Old Man, sullenly.

"I am delighted to hear it. You cannot tell how much we have missed you here since last fall, when you all went away. When do you intend honoring Little Neck again?"

"Oh, before long. By the way, have you that youth, Charley Smith, with you yet?"

"Oh, yes. He is improving all the while, and I shall make a great business man of him yet, and I trust you will honor me with your custom again this season," he added.

"Not if I can help it," said Mr. Burwick.

"What?"

"Not further than I can help, Mr. Dubb. I regard you as a skin."

"A what?"

"A skin."

"But, my dear sir, I am a deacon in——"

"Oh, yes. I understand all that, but at the same time I believe you to be a skin of the first water, and I don't like you. What I cannot buy elsewhere I may possibly buy of you, but I think you would skin a bed-bug for its hide and tallow, and then curse it because it hadn't hoofs out of which you might get glue."

"Why, Mr. Burwick, you are very plain."

"Yes, that's my weakness. I am used to calling a spade a spade, and no hypocrisy. I call you a skin and a beat, and I give you a fair warning that if you don't mend your ways, I will start a store in opposition to you and astonish the people of Little Neck by showing them what honest dealing is."

"But, my dear sir, I——"

"Oh, you can't help it—I know it. You were born so. You are a natural skin, and of course you cannot help it. But you have socked it to me all you are going to—I'll give you a pointer on that," said he, savagely.

"But you——"

"I am going," said he, as the train rolled up to the station, and the Old Man stepped aboard, leaving the hypocritical "skin" looking after him.

Dubb had walked with him to the station.

"Oh, he's an old bald-headed crank anyhow. He has never been regenerated by religion. But, oh, how I'll pinch him on that account for eggs! I'll make him wish that he had not slandered a church member. I'll fix him, for is it not said that to him that hath shall be given? Well, I've got the bulge on that old bald-headed heretic. Around my store I'll draw the awful circle of the church, and that will be sure to break him all up, to use a vile and worldly expression. He called me a skin, and I a deacon of the church! It is a wonder the mountains didn't fall on him. They probably would if there had been any mountains on Long Island. And if it had been in almost any other place the earth would probably have opened and swallowed him up. But if the earth should open on Long Island, the whole concern might go down. It is just my luck. But I will get the best of him yet. Those eggs! Ah, I have him on the eggs!"

Thus ruminated Dubb as he walked back to his store, where he wet down the salt codfish again, and threw a few handfuls of sand into the sugar-barrel, and gave it a

good stirring, so that no man should get more than another.

Dubb's ideas of justice and fair-dealing were very strict and perpendicular.

"Charles," he called to his clerk.

"Yes, sir."

"Has Pat been over here to-day with any eggs or butter?"

"No, sir."

"Well, out there in the shed there are a few dozen eggs that have been frozen, and, of course, are spoiled. I cannot afford to lose them. So when Pat comes around again, just give them to him and say that so many of his eggs have been returned as bad. To him that hath shall be given," and he stirred another pound or two of sand into the sugar.

Charley Smith didn't make any reply, but he wished he was strong enough to combat that cheek of his boss, and tell him just what he thought of him, for he knew that the eggs Pat brought from the Shorty farm were first-class, and the most eagerly sought after by their customers, because they knew that they were laid by fancy breeds of hens, and anything "fancy" goes.

Pat, in the meantime, from what Mr. Burwick had said to him, had concluded not to sell Dubb only one more lot of eggs, resolved to keep the remainder until the family returned, and let them do what they liked with them.

But he took a dozen dozen to him a few days afterward, when the clerk ventured to tell him what the boss had told him regarding the eggs that had gone wrong on his hands, and which he wished to make good.

But Pat wouldn't have it. He knew that the eggs he had sold Dubb were all right, and at once suspected a cheat.

So the clerk referred him to the boss.

"Are yees afther sayin' that ther eggs I war sellin' yees war stale?" he asked.

"Yes, quite a number of them were very ancient, Pat," said Dubb, smiling.

"Then, begorra, they were ancient when they were laid. But that couldn't be, for we haven't an *ould* hin in the lot."

"Oh, that is all very well for you to say, Pat, but you are mistaken, and must either take back the eggs or give me credit for them," said he.

Pat started back and looked at him.

"Do yees mane it?" he asked.

"Of course I do."

Dubb was very cool, for in the absence of Mr. Burwick he thought he could afford to be.

There was a butter-firkin full of the stale eggs, and as Pat contemplated them he got mad.

He knew it was a fraud, but looked at Dubb again to make sure that he meant it.

He did evidently.

"Mr. Dubb!" he finally exclaimed.

"Well?"

"Yer a bloody ould bate!"

"What is that, sir?" demanded Dubb.

"Yer a bloody ould skin, an' if yer don't take back fut yer've said I'll take ther law in me own hands."

"What is that you say, sir?"

"I say yer a bloody ould skin, as ivery man in town says av yees."

"You are a liar, sir, and I'll——"

Before he had a chance to say what he would do, Pat had made up his mind what he would do, and no nonsense.

Seizing the rascally store-keeper by the slack of his trousers and the coat-collar, he lifted him as a man would a child, and having him head down and heels up in the air, he just jammed his head into that firkin of rotten eggs until it was lost to sight in the terrible jam and accompanying stench.

Yes, the stench itself was enough to stop a saw-mill or a country circus.

And after dipping him into this mess a half a dozen times or more, he stood him on his feet and let him gasp and drip a few moments without speaking.

Dubb was indeed gasping, and indeed in a struggle for life.

The terrible mess was in his mouth, eyes, ears—everywhere, and he thought his last hour had come in right good earnest.

"He opened his eyes for ter spake," said Pat, speaking of it afterward.

But Pat was there.

"Der yer take it back?" he demanded.

"What?" the poor wretch managed to gasp.

"Fut yees said about me an' ther eggs."

"I—I——"

"Take it all back, an' say yees are a darn bate, or in yer go again, inter yer rotten eggs," and Pat made a motion to seize him.

"I—I——"

"Fut is it yees say?"

"Yes, I—I——"

"Yer takes it all back?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well it's good for yees that yer do, if yer don't loike stale eggs."

"But I'll——"

"Yer'll take ther law on me, will yees?"

"Yes, I——"

"Oh, yer *will*!" and Pat seized him again as he had done at first.

"No, no; I—I—I had no notion of it," stammered the unhappy wretch, trying to clear his eyes, mouth, ears and nose of the horrible dose that had been forced into them.

"Beggorra, an' yees had betther not. Now, let me hear no more about yer stale eggs, an' yer tryin' to bate Mr. Burwick out av thim, or I'll give yees some more av ther same taste."

"Oh—oh, certainly not; only I——"

"Divil a wurrud more, an' in yees go again!" cried the exasperated Irishman.

"No, no, of course not," and while he was at a pail of water, trying to wash away the evidence and the fragrance of his mishap, Pat quietly sauntered toward home.

The clerk Charley saw it all, but he was always stone-blind whenever anything happened to his boss, or whenever he was in error, anyway.

But Bedemus Dubb was mad, even after he had washed away the flavoring evidences of his egg encounter, and he

had it in his heart to go at once to the nearest magistrate and swear out a warrant for Pat's arrest.

But what for?

How could he state his case?

And how could he make it out that he was in the right, and Pat in the wrong?

Besides this, would not the laugh of the whole neighborhood and community be dead against him, if he should attempt to take Pat into court and show what his grievance really was?

Yes, there could be no doubt about it, and so he hesitated.

Finally he concluded to say nothing about it, at the same time cautioning his clerk against saying anything, if he knew anything.

"But, oh!" thought he, "how I will make old Burwick smart for this! I will make him wish that a crocodile had swallowed him while he was in long clothes. And as for that Irishman, I will set my whole church against him, and it will pray him into outer darkness for this foul act upon me!"

But that settled the business of eggs between Dubb and the Shorty farm.

Two weeks from that time a dozen carpenters and half as many masons and painters, together with other mechanics, accompanied a couple of car-loads of building material which was speedily deposited on a vacant lot almost opposite to Bedemus Dubb's store.

What it meant nobody seemed to know, and the mechanics were dumb, or spoke only enough to say that they were building a hospital.

But Dubb, who knew everybody's affairs, found out that this lot of land had recently been purchased by J. Burwick & Co., and yet he could find out nothing more.

The mechanics went right to work at the foundations, and almost in a night a building of fine proportions was erected, and, with a speed that astonished all Long Islanders, a first-class store made its appearance.

In the meantime, the whole Shorty family came from New York and took possession of the farm homestead.

Spring was upon Long Island.

The turf grew green, the birds were mating, and their songs seemed like the vocal thawing out of all that was beautiful in nature.

The early flowers began to show forth, and the cheery voice of the farmer, as he urged his plowing team along, together with the balmy breath and promise of summer, made what had lately been ice-bound seem like a budding Arcadia.

You see I can sling poetry if I want to.

But to this new store.

Then, after it was finished, and the mechanics had gone away, there came boxes and barrels, bundles and crates, all directed to J. Burwick & Co.

Strange, too, that the clerk, Charley Smith, who had served so long with old Dubb, all at once took it into his head to leave him, and, strange again, he was put in charge of the new store, and proceeded with much tact to get everything in order for an opening.

The whole thing had nearly paralyzed Little Neck, but people soon began to understand with pleasure that there

was to be a store in opposition to that of Bedemus Dubb, and yet the strangest part of it was that Charley Smith seemed to be at the head of it, although, of course, it was understood that somebody with cash was behind him.

As for old Dubb, he laughed at the idea of a store in opposition to him.

The village could hardly support more than one store, because so many people got their things in New York, and as he had the first and strongest pull, there could be no chance for anybody else.

But the old man Burwick was there nearly every day, and when he was not, either Shorty or the Kid were, and outside of all their accustomed fun and family rackets, they all seemed to be dead in earnest about the store.

They were bound to run old Dubb out of town.

So when the opening night came the people flocked into the new store, only to be surprised at the cheapness of things. Indeed, nearly everything was about one-half what Mr. Dubb had been charging for them.

It created a decided sensation in the village, and Dubb's store was deserted, greatly to his indignation, of course.

"But it won't last long," said he. "No man, unless he is rich enough not to want to keep store, can stand it to sell goods less than cost. I can live while they are having their fun."

But the Shortys were not selling below cost. They were making just enough to cover expenses, and that was all they wanted to do until they had killed old Dubb. And, besides keeping a much better article in every particular, and giving everything unadulterated, they could afford to sell for one-half of what the villagers had been obliged to pay, and then make a profit.

So it is no wonder that the people had a jubilee, and hailed the Burwicks as benefactors, and it is no wonder that they congratulated Charley Smith on his good change of base, for he had always been liked quite as much as his boss had been disliked.

The Shortys were delighted with their success in punishing old Dubb. The Old Man gave it a deal of personal attention when he felt that he could get away from his farm-work, for it will be remembered that he was such an enthusiast that it seemed as though he didn't believe things would grow at all unless he was on hand in person to watch them.

But Shorty and the Kid spent much of their time at the new store, sometimes waiting upon customers, because there was always more or less fun to be had in doing it, and while the novelty lasted, they made themselves quite useful.

They called it "The Burwick Square Store," and while it was doing all the business there was in the village, old Bedemus Dubb looked savagely from his own deserted store door, and threatened to get fearfully square with every one of his former patrons whom he saw going there.

In vain he tried to get back some of his fellow church members to resume dealing with him, but he soon found that self-interest was a stronger magnet than religion was, and so he failed again.

His stock, or the perishable part of it, soon began to waste away. His eggs got rotten, his butter ruined, and as for the small stock of cheese he had on hand, the skippers took

care of that in lively style, as the worms did of his flour.

But his molasses and kerosene kept all right, as did his dry goods and hardware; yet there was nobody to buy them. He even got so desperate after awhile that he offered to sell some of the stock he had on hand for less than was asked for the same goods at "The Square Store," but people only laughed at him.

"No, you don't, Mr. Dubb," said they.

"Oh, no, we've been there before."

"No sanded sugar in ours."

"No gunpowder kerosene, if you please."

"No rusty No. 3 mackerel."

"No more short weight and measure in ours," and various other answers, were made to him.

Some, however, said they would trade with him again if he would sell as good articles at the same price as at the Square Store, but he would have it that they were selling for less than cost, and that he could not afford to do it. If the Burwicks wanted to lose money for the sake of breaking him up in his business, let them. He could stand it as long as they could, and when they got tired of the business he would open again.

But they didn't seem to get tired much, if any, neither did the benefited villagers get tired of trading with them, and finally old Dubb got desperate, and began suing those who had not paid up.

Here again the Old Man came to the front and hired a smart lawyer to defend the suits for the people, free of charge to them, on the ground of fraud, having Charley Smith to fall back on for a witness to the cheating.

This made Dubb even sicker than before, and so he not only compromised and took what he could get out of his delinquents, but finally sold out his stock at auction for the most it would bring, which was a little indeed, after which he sullenly left town, probably in search of some other place where he would have no opposition and could charge just what he liked for inferior articles.

But he left a delighted lot of people behind, and who literally drummed him out of town.

First blood and a clean knockdown for the Shortys! In fact, a complete knock-out.

But while all this was going on, and this victory being won, Mr. Burwick, Sr., was up to his eyes in business, of course, and yet he would not allow either Shorty or the Kid to take any part in the farming.

They could run the store as much as they wanted to, but he would run the farm.

This they quietly objected to, as will be seen further on, when the crops began to come up.

But let us go back a short time, or to when Shorty and the Kid tried their little mules, before spoken of.

The entire family moved out to the farm early in the spring, for the three wives were anxious to get to work in their flower garden, each one of whom had obtained something choice to be set out or grafted, and they were bound to make up for the comparative failure of the last year, on account of the Old Man's wonderful breed of hogs.

It will be remembered that each one of them, the Old Man, Shorty, and the Kid, had a mule for his own private use, graduated in size to correspond with his own size. And naturally enough they had been fed well and had

nothing to do all winter, and were feeling exceedingly frisky for mules, while Pat had used the Old Man's so much that it was just about the same as when he left it in the fall.

Shorty and the Kid had enjoyed much sport with those little mules of theirs, racing and riding all about the country, for they were fine animals, and very fast; but of course there is no such feeling in a mule, as between animal and master, as there is between a man and a horse, one being an intelligent animal, and the other a hybrid or mongrel.

Nevertheless, they are very useful animals, if they are not so handsome as a horse, and, of course, they suited the comical Shortys better than horses.

They had often talked over during the winter what they would do the next season with the mules, and one thing was fully decided on.

There were several heavy swells from New York who summered in that part of Long Island, and it was a high-daddy caper with them to drive about the country in a dog-cart and tandem team, doing the heavy English for the sake of astonishing the natives.

Shorty resolved to see their swell tandems, and go them one better.

So they bought a dog-cart that was just the right size for the Old Man's mule, and then each one of them a fancy harness.

They were bound to have three-in-hand or nothing, with the Kid behind as tiger.

They had lots of fun talking the matter over, but the Old Man did not object, for it would take up some of their mischievous attention, and keep them away from matters that he wanted to have all alone to himself.

The dog-cart and harness went out when Shorty and the others went out for the summer, but they decided not to use their three-in-hand tandem until the season was further advanced and the roads not quite so muddy, as they always are on Long Island after the breaking up of winter.

But those mules could, of course, be ridden to saddle as usual, and so they went for them, feeling that they most likely needed exercise after their long loaf in the stable.

So they proceeded to saddle and bridle them.

"Whoa, Dr. Landis!" cried Shorty, as his mule began to frisk around and object to harness.

"Whoa, Count Joannes!" yelled the Kid, whose little mule began to dance and to send out his hind legs viciously.

"Whoa! Oh, they are feeling elegantly, and we will have a splendid gallop over the country," said Shorty, succeeding in getting the bridle on his mule.

"Whoa, Count, whoa! What in thunder is ther matter with yer? I should say they were feeling fine. Take in that bit, or I'll bust yer jaw!"

He took it in, but let go his heels savagely as he did so.

"Whoa, Dr. Landis! You just wait until I get on top of you. I'll take some of the oats out of you, and don't forget it."

They both finally got their mules in harness, and before the little one knew it, the Kid was in the saddle with a grip on the reins.

Shorty attempted to do the same thing, but that mule

of his was so yeasty that when he got where he calculated he saddle was it was away around on the other side.

The Kid would have laughed at his father's failure, but just at that moment he was doing his level best to maintain a perpendicular, for that little mule of his, after darting out of the stable, then stopping suddenly for the purpose of shooting its rider over its head, was now seemingly trying to stand on his head, while his heels appeared to be working to play a tune on an imaginary drum up about ten feet in the air. But he clung to him like a flea to a dog's back.

Shorty was not so spry as he had been ten or fifteen years before, when he used to dance and play monkey parts on the stage, as those who remember the history of the celebrated minstrel will remember.

But he wasn't the kind of a chap to give up, even if the mule was not so fat as he was, and a deal spryer. So, while the Kid was trying to keep his seat, he just managed to get one for himself on his mule.

"Whoa, Dr. Landis! Anybody would think you had a sheep-tick or a jigger on you somewhere!" he cried, as his mule shot out of the stable-door and tried the same unseating tactics that the Kid's had.

But there was this difference in the result of their experiments—the Kid was not thrown.

But Shorty was.

He shot off over that mule's head like a frog that is taking a frightened header into the water.

But he retained his grip on the bridle-rein, and this kept him from landing head-first on the ground, and it also prevented his mule from getting away.

"Whoa, Landis!" he cried.

"Better call him *Land-us*, pop," laughed the Kid.

But even while he laughed at his dad's mishap, his own little mule suddenly humped himself in the process called bucking, and the Kid shot up into the air about ten feet, like a ball.

This brought the family from the house, and their two wives were loud in their advice for them to let the ugly creatures go, while the three "chips" were delighted.

"Do so some more, pop," cried Shorty's youngster.

"Oh, he can't beat my pop goin' up in ther air!" cried the Kid's kid; and it was evident that they all looked upon it as a sort of a circus, that had been gotten up for their amusement.

"You shut up!" cried the anxious mothers.

"Don't try it again, Charley," pleaded his wife.

But the stunned and exasperated Kid made no reply. He was busy trying to surround his mule, and at the same time to keep out of the reach of his hind hoofs, which were flying wildly in several directions.

And during this, and while being cheered on by the delighted "chips," Shorty managed to get into his saddle once more.

Then he assisted the Kid to get on top once more. But during the next half-hour it was a circus indeed, which the "chips" appreciated, if no one else did. First Shorty and then the Kid would go up in the air from the suddenly humped spines of those yeasty mules.

The wives were in a great state of turpitude, and could not help thinking how they must look in widows' weeds,

while the delighted "chips" were applauding with much energy, and even betting each other on whose dad would go highest:

A circus!

It was Barnum's three-ringer to them at least.

But both Shorty and the Kid were game, and did not weaken in the least.

Finally the mules seemed to tire of the business, and once more their masters were firmly astride of them.

"Whoa, Dr. Landis," said Shorty, soothingly.

"Whoa, Count Joannes!" added the Kid, and the animals actually did seem inclined to "whoa."

They rested a moment and flapped their ears.

"Let those dreadful creatures alone, or they will be sure to kill you both," cried Shorty's wife.

"Ah, Sally, in the bright lexicon of youth there is no no such word as *break*," said he.

"Wasn't there, though?"

"Go it, pop!" cried his little son.

"Go up some more, daddy," called the Kid's kid, for which their mothers reproved them sharply.

"I wish my pop was here—he'd show you how ter go up and play circus," said the Old Man's "chip."

Those mules appeared to be in deep thought.

Suddenly, also, they both appeared to come to a conclusion—an energetic one.

They flapped their long ears in unison.

They started together, and before their riders had time to even guess what their intentions were, they made a concerted break for the front fence, took it at the same time, and went over it into the road like two thoroughbred hunters.

The wives screamed.

The children cheered and cried: "Let 'em go!"

And go they did, down the road as though the King of Darkness was after them.

But Shorty and the Kid clung to them, while the mules seemed determined to try to see if they couldn't run out from under them, having failed to get rid of them in any other way.

Down the road like mad they went, followed by the delighted children, who were still taking it in as a circus, while the wives tried to faint, and felt certain they were going to be widows, all on account of those mules and their mulish husbands.

They were out of sight around the bend of the road in a jiffy, greatly to the disgust of the youngsters, who thought they were being cheated out of the best part of their circus.

Once or twice the mules stopped and "bucked," but by this time their game riders had got used to their bouncing rackets, and not only avoided the "heave," but put their mule-whips to them in right good earnest.

The result was not long in manifesting itself, for, finding themselves mastered, they shot straight ahead for all they were worth.

Both Shorty and the Kid lost their hats, but they did not lose their heads or their seats.

Neither did they lose their grip, but continued to give mule whip with all their strength.

The farmers stopped to look at the novel sight, undecided whether it was a race or a runaway.

Pedestrians got out of the way, and even farm-wagons drew to one side of the road.

On they went, and on went the lashes of those mule-whips.

For at least three miles they went before the spirited animals began to tire and take a tumble.

But they finally did, and if they concluded anything, it was that they had found their masters, and somebody who would stay on top of them, with all their oats.

The Old Man came up from the farm soon after his sons had vanished in the manner described, and the two wives went for him tearfully and with vehemence at the same time, while the youngsters were trying to tell him about the circus."

"It is an awful shame," cried the wives, whose husbands were in danger of having their mortal remains scattered along the highway, as they thought.

"Oh, it was just bully!" exclaimed Shorty's kid.

"Hush, or I will spank you," said his mother.

"What is awful?" asked the Old Man, winking to himself, for by this time he had learned enough to convince himself that what Pat had said regarding the mules was true.

"It is a shame to keep those horrid beasts on the place, and if they are not killed, sold, or given away, I am going back to New York," said the Kid's wife.

"Oh, there is no knowing what has become of them? Do saddle your mule and follow them," said Shorty's wife, appealingly.

"Not much," said the Old Man, laughing.

"What!" all three of them exclaimed.

"Bring 'em back an' have some more circus!" cried those animated kids.

"Why, they wanted exercise quite as bad as their mules did. It will do them all good," said he, laughing some more.

"Oh, you horrid Old Man!" cried the Kid's wife.

"Those mules shall be shot," added Shorty's better-half.

"Oh, they will return all right. I know the boys, and I'll bet they'll stay on top of those mules until the mules get tired. They are chips of the old block, my dears," he added, proudly.

"Oh, but it is terrible. They are forever doing something to keep us in a worry."

"Oh, they are, eh? They are generally doing something to keep *me* in a worry, and I guess you can stand a little thing like this," he said.

"But they may get killed!"

"I'll risk it," said he.

"You will! You don't care a snap for either of them, or you would go and see what has become of them," whined the Kid's wife.

"I'll bet my pop gets home first," said the sportive young chip belonging to Shorty.

"Bet he don't," replied the Kid's kid.

"Why don't you go, so I can bet on you?" asked the Old Man's hopeful.

"What!", exclaimed he, turning frowningly upon the sportively-inclined child of his loins.

"Well, Pete an' Charley can have some fun with their pops, but they say my pop's no good; he isn't game for circus," said he.

For an instant it was a question with the Old Man whether to spank his hopeful son or to humor him by mounting his mule and going after Shorty and the Kid.

But while contemplating the matter, a cry was raised by the boys, and looking up, he saw the runaways returning.

Returning quietly.

Their mules were broken. Mules though they were, they evidently knew when they had found their masters and when they had got enough.

But both Shorty and the Kid, although evidently triumphant in the long run, were sights to behold.

The exercise the mules had given them before taking the fence and to the highway had sadly disarranged their apparel, and left several bleeding scratches on their mugs. True, they had recovered their hats on their way back, but they were sorry, muddy-looking tiles now, and, what with the mud thrown up by the heels of the mules and what they had before-time picked up, they were a pair of daisies when they rode up to their home.

"Oh, Charles!"

"Oh, George!" cried the anxious wives.

"Oh, pop! Hi, yi, let 'em go some more!" cried both of their animated sons.

"Are you hurt?" both wives asked.

"Hurt!"

"Hurt!" one exclaimed after the other.

"Do we look hurt?"

"You look *sick*," suggested the Old Man.

"Well, how do the mules look?" asked Shorty.

"Tired, but not quite so muddy as you do. Guess they have been on their feet more than you fellows have," said the Old Man, laughing heartily.

"Oh, what an unfeeling old man you are," said Shorty's wife, and the kids agreed with her.

"It's been nip and tuck, dad, but Tuck rides home all right you see, eh?"

"Oh, yes; I knew you would come back all right, like bad pennies. But it only goes to show that your mules don't know their business."

"How?"

"If they had, they would have killed you, even if they had to lay down and roll over you," said the Old Man, for this was the first time he had had a chance to chaff his tormentors in a long while.

"If you only *had* any hair!" exclaimed the Kid's wife, approaching him with half-clutched hands.

A laugh rounded off the thing as both Shorty and the Kid made their mules take the fence again, as they had so freshly done before, but the youngsters were greatly disappointed when they found the circus was over.

Indeed, remembering the racket of the summer before, they teased the Old Man to get the pigs out of their sty and have some fun with them, the same as he did once before.

But he wasn't on it any more. One experience of that kind was all he wanted in a life-time.

A good bath, some court-plaster, and a little arnica fixed Shorty and the Kid up all right again, although

they couldn't but admit that the Old Man had the laugh on them this time, a thing that seldom happened, however.

"Oh, we'll put something in his stocking before long," Shorty said to the Kid.

"I'd like ter put a chestnut burr under his saddle," growled the Kid.

"You just lock your jaw and look honest. I will copper the Old Man's snicker before long," replied Shorty, and they shook hands.

But they didn't give up those mules, by any manner of means, or have them shot or sold, as their wives suggested.

Oh, no! They got on top of them every day for a week or two, and worked them down to a state of humility so great that they became as meek as lambs when harnessed and mounted.

But Shorty and the Kid had old scores to pay off, and old sores to heal.

So they put those mules through their facings every day. And they would never allow them to go out through the gate, but made them take the front fence every time.

It is a question whether mules can think more than a minute ahead or not, but if they can do so, they must have seen that their riders had the dead wood on them, and so quietly succumbed to the inevitable.

And when thoroughly broken again, when thoroughly sorry for their oatish pranks, Shorty and the Kid arranged their three in-line tandem.

The mules were quiet enough by this time, and Shorty and the Kid were undoubtedly the bosses of the whole business.

True, they had not taken much stock in the farming racket this year, only that some very strange things came up with the potatoes and the corn, as Pat knew very well, but he said nothing about it. Indeed, what time they had from their yacht and their mules they had given to the store, where they had had much fun, as will be seen later on.

Finally, one day, a heavy swell with a tandem team went past the house, and that gave Shorty to understand that the dudes and the Anglomaniacs had arrived in force, for the cheap purpose of astonishing the natives of Long Island.

And yet it doesn't take much to astonish a Long Islander—almost anything out of the regular course of things will do that.

But Shorty was bound to be to the front or nowhere.

It took considerable persuasion to get his wife to take a hand in the caper, but she finally agreed to do so.

Well, and wasn't it a caper!

A proper caper!

The three mules were harnessed up in order of size.

The Old Man's, in the shafts of the dog-cart, with his new shining harness, looked like a sleek thoroughbred.

Shorty's mule, just a size smaller, took to his new harness and his new condition with much amiability, and as for the Kid's smaller mule, to which the reader has already been introduced, he pranced a little when put in harness and ahead of the others.

The result of this was beautiful.

Three mules in tandem, ranging from a large one in shaft down to a very small one as leader—and all three fine animals in color, shape, and speed—was something not always to be seen.

Shorty knew this, and his racket was to see these imitation English snobs and go them one better—and in style, too.

So the Kid togged himself out in small clothes and top-boots—a genteel burlesque on the English "Tiger"—while Shorty and his wife occupied the front seat of the dog-cart, and Shorty, the original, drew the lines.

It was a sight to behold.

The Kid acted his part splendidly, and sat on the back seat of the cart, back to Shorty and his wife, with his hands folded, and a look on his mug almost as idiotic as those fellows put on who attempt to imitate the English aristocracy—those Anglomaniacs who make people sick.

But there was no snuff on this unique turn-out of Shorty. It was away up among the nineties on the dead level.

Three mules in tandem, and graduated in size as they were, and togged out with new harness, ahead of a first-class dog-cart, on which was seated such a combination—it broke everybody all up.

Of course everybody in Little Neck knew who the party was, but outside of that locality, as they drove along, the query was:

"Who are they?"

And well they might have asked, for a more funny and unique turn-out had never been seen on Long Island, if anywhere, before.

It was faultless, and very high-strung.

And Shorty was a driver.

And his wife was a good-looker.

And the Kid, with folded arms, seated behind, never had an equal.

And it's no wonder they created a sensation.

Starting from the Square Store, or the Shortys' Country Store, they caught the eye of everybody as they drove through the town, and as for the swells, the Anglomaniacs, they just felt sick.

And as for Shorty's wife, really Mrs. George Burwick, of elegant standing, she was very nervous at first. But when she really caught on to her husband's burlesque in the matter, she enjoyed it. There was no wild and reckless business about it, but, on the contrary, both with him and the Kid, a sober but ridiculous take-off on the Anglomaniacal snobs who were driving about the country with dog-cart and tandem team.

This snap broke them all up. It was and was not a burlesque and a satire upon them, for Shorty had gone not only one better than they could go, but he had done it in such a costly and tasty style that they all wanted to know who he was.

But Shorty was away up on the bit, and, knowing what he was about, he did not propose to work a give-away game, and so stood up high, just as though he had been some unknown duke, while the Kid, dressed in the regulation English tiger style, was doing his part to perfection, sitting up there behind with his arms folded and looking as solemn as an owl.

And Shorty's wife was also dressed in faultless English

riding costume, and so nothing was lacking in any particular.

Shorty snatched the bun, as usual.

The next day they drove out again, Shorty and the Kid changing places, also their wives, and it was still another big success, as it was also when the Old Man took the reins and Shorty acted the part of the tiger. And the mules themselves appeared to like it much better than being driven under saddle, while the whole thing proved a big advertisement for their country store.

And this reminds me of a snap of the Kid's getting up.

He painted a sign large enough to be easily read, and one day, when he was acting the tiger for the Old Man and his wife, he held this sign up to view: "DELIVERING GOODS FROM THE SHORTYS' COUNTRY STORE."

Everybody who read it laughed, but as the little joker was sitting back to the Old Man and his wife, they, of course, did not see it, nor did they much wonder at the grinning faces they saw, for they thought, of course, that it was on account of the unique turn-out.

And so it will be seen that there was a plenty of amusement for the Shortys. On rainy days they helped about the store, or, at all events, made it their head-quarters; and in good weather the boys were either out with their yacht or their now celebrated mule tandem, while, of course, the Old Man was assisting nature to work up his crops.

I had the pleasure of a drive with Shorty and the Kid, as tiger, one day during the season, and in writing about it I am only giving it to my readers just as I know it to be. And I also know that there is more hospitality to the square inch in that elegant farm-house home of my heroes than can be found to the square rod anywhere else in the world.

True, the Old Man and his wife are a little sore over my writing up about their fishing, hunting, and farming experience; but they solaced themselves on the occasion of my last visit with the belief that there surely would be nothing this time out of which I could make a book.

The farm was apparently doing first rate, and the crops looking finely. He had some very "likely"-looking hogs (no "improved" stock this time), and he quietly informed me that he was going to buy a cow-milking machine, but requested me to say nothing about it to either Shorty or the Kid.

Yes, everything was exceedingly lovely at the Shorty homestead on the occasion of my visit there, but I am very much afraid that those youngsters who are coming up—those chips of the old blocks—are destined to give their poor parents trouble.

For they are indeed chips of the old blocks; and having known both Shorty and the Kid ever since they were both kids themselves, I think I may say, without fear of contradiction, that their two boys, as well as that of the Old Man, are just about as full of deviltry as ever they were, and it may become my painful duty one of these days to state some of their doings to the world that has so long known their parents.

It was a great treat for the three little kids to go to the Shortys' Country Store, for there were not only nuts and

candy there, but a whole lot of other goodies, which they could sometimes get if they kept in with Charley Smith.

But of late their mothers had forbidden him to give them so much candy, fearing that it would ruin their teeth, and in spite of all their pleadings, he would only give them a taste now and then, although they helped themselves to the peanuts whenever he was not looking.

Indeed, they were a great nuisance around the store, but it would never do for young Smith to say so. No, no; he had fallen upon something too much resembling a plum-pudding to be in any way careless about losing it, and so, like a sensible young man, he tolerated and got along with them the best he could.

One day, when he was busy with customers, the three little rascals came into the store and began to nose about as usual.

Candy was what they were after, but it was up on a high shelf, out of their reach, so they began to look around in search of the next best thing.

Now, it happened that molasses was about the next best thing they could find, but that was also hard to get at, because the faucet of the hogshead turned so hard.

It was situated in a back room of the store, and if those youngsters could have managed it, they would have swum in the liquid taffy.

But they soon ascertained that the top of the hogshead was open, or at least only lightly covered, and after consulting awhile, it was agreed to use the step-ladder in getting all they wanted.

And so the young conspirators managed to get the step-ladder up alongside of the hogshead of molasses, and the Old Man's "chip" was the first to mount it.

He lifted the cover and glared with big eyes at the dark depths of sweetness below.

"Oh, yum, yum, yum!" he cried, and the other two smacked their eager lips.

"How much is there?" asked the Kid's kid.

"Oh, more'n a bushel!" he exclaimed.

"Hush, will yer, or he'll drop on us," said Shorty's "chip," in a whisper.

"Here, dip us out some," said the Kid's "chip," holding a gallon measure up for him to reach.

It was as much as the little adventurer could do to lift the measure, to say nothing of what he expected to do when it was full of molasses.

Shorty's "chip" was keeping watch upon Charley Smith.

Oh, what gobs of fun!

The Old Man's "chip" lifted the measure over the edge of the hogshead. The other two said:

"Yum, yum, yum!" as they contemplated the result.

Now this was all very well, and very juvenile, of course, but they couldn't help it, for they were juveniles themselves.

Again they smacked their lips and said:

"Oh, yum, yum, yum!"

The Old Man's "chip" reached over with the measure for the purpose of scooping up enough of the sweet to satisfy them all.

But the molasses was fully a foot below the edge of the hogshead over which he leaned.

And yet he was bound to have some of it, so he leaned well over; in fact, so far that his little feet were lifted from the ladder, and he was balanced on the edge of the hogshead.

He dipped; he filled the measure.

But the weight of it was too much for the preservation of his balance.

There was a yell.

A flop.

A sudden disappearance.

And then a moment's silence.

Then the other two "chips" comprehended the situation, and set up a cry.

"Ah! Toady's in ther 'lasses!" they yelled.

"Toady, you come away from that molasses," called Charley Smith, from the front part of the store.

"He's in it!"

"Well, if he don't get out of it I'll pull his ear!"

"Oh, he's tumbled in it!" came the cry, and it was so earnest and agonizing that it startled the young man into investigating.

Going into the back part of the store, where wet goods were kept, he saw only two "chips."

"Where is Toady?" he asked.

"In the 'lasses," they both answered, in alarm.

Smith glanced at the hogshead of molasses, saw the step-ladder alongside of it and the cover turned back, and it instantly occurred to him what the young rascals had been up to, and what had become of one of them.

"Quick—quick!" called the other two.

Hastily mounting the ladder, Smith looked wildly into the molasses, and saw something moving in it.

He seized that something.

It proved to be the missing kid's foot, and he at once lifted him out of the sweetness.

He held him up by the ankle to allow the molasses to drain off, for he had not yet forgotten the lessons of thrift and economy which had been taught him by old Dubb. He mustn't waste the molasses on any account.

Strange, but the other two kids began to laugh when they saw their little companion held up by the heels in this way, not knowing whether he was dead or alive.

At that moment the Old Man and his wife entered the store.

"Great heavens! what is that you have found in the molasses?" he asked.

"A boy, Mr. Burwick," replied Smith.

"A boy!" both he and his wife exclaimed.

"Yes."

"It's Toady!" cried Shorty's boy.

"What!"

"Toady. He tumbled in."

Mrs. Burwick proceeded to faint.

Mr. Burwick to swear.

"Quick! souse him in the horse-trough," he cried, as Smith came down the ladder.

"Give him some horse water!" cried the Kid's kid, for to both of them it was awfully funny.

Smith followed instructions, and carried the dripping youngster out to the horse-trough in front of the store, where he proceeded to souse him in a most energetic way,

for the purpose of washing the molasses from him to some extent.

And while he was doing so, Mrs. Burwick revived and rushed out to the scene of action.

"Mercy—mercy! What are you doing?" she cried.

"Washing the molasses off him, ma'am."

"But you will drown him."

"Hold on!" said the old man, stopping the wash.

"Give him some more," suggested one of the delighted youngsters who stood by.

"I'll spank you if you don't shut up! I have no idea but that you pushed him in," said the mother.

"No, he tumbled in."

But the chip of the old man wasn't quite dead, although he was undoubtedly cured of his love for molasses and water.

He kicked and yelled like a stuck pig just the moment he could get the sweetness out of his mouth, for he had taken in a large quantity of it, and his half-distracted parents took him in hand.

"Pity we didn't have a wringing machine," said the Old Man, without thinking.

"Oh, you wretch!" exclaimed the excited mother, turning upon the thoughtless father. "I—I—are you not glad that your child is at death's door? One would think so from your brutal remarks."

"No, no, girlie. I am sorry that he is not at this moment in a fit condition to spank," replied the Old Man, as he reached for his kid.

"Worse and worse, Josiah Burwick. Give me the child; you shall not touch it," said she, taking him in her arms. "Spank the poor, dear, half-dead darling, would you?"

"Yes, that is, if he wasn't half dead."

"Oh, you hardened creature, I am astonished at you. Come, Toady, dear, let us go home," she added, standing the "sweet" infant on his pins.

The other two "chips" were laughing at him, and naturally enough he was mad.

He scooped some more of the molasses out of his eyes, and turned upon them.

"I'll break your jaws to pay for this!" said he, at the same time shaking his little fist at them.

But of course they were bound to laugh, and did so, until the indignant mother got him away out of hearing.

The Old Man stood amazed, for in all his life he had never heard his wife make use of such language, or show so much excitement.

True, he had never seen her under the same conditions. Never before had their only son fallen into a hogshead of molasses and been rinsed off in a horse-trough, and of course he had never had a chance to see how she would act before.

From the other two boys, and from the clerk, he learned the particulars of the almost tragedy, and more than once he had to check the laughter of the young rascals by threatening to spank them. But he had to laugh afterward when he heard Shorty's kid say to the other one: "Don't I wish it had been old pop that tumbled in!"

"Oh, wouldn't that be bully!" replied the other.

On reaching home, he found his hopeful son all right. After being stripped to the hide, and given a thorough

washing, he was like himself again in a change of clothing.

But he had a squirt-gun well charged, and was lying in wait for the other two youngsters who had laughed at him in his sweet misfortune.

They were all three genuine Shortys.

All three of them were in bed before their parents sat down to supper, where the exploit furnished amusement for Shorty and the Kid, although the three wives could not see that there was any fun in it.

And this, among other things that I noticed in them during my visit, leads me to believe that the stock of Shortys will not die out with the Old Man, Shorty, and the comical Kid.

"What's Charley going to do with the molasses?" asked Shorty, after they had laughed over the case awhile.

"Why, what harm did it do it?" asked the Old Man.

"Yes, what harm, I'd like to know?" demanded his wife. "I'd have you know that Toady is clean!"

"Of course he is now, but he isn't half so sweet as he was," replied Shorty.

"Well, he's just as sweet as your boy is!"

"Well, soy, what yer goin' ter do with ther water in ther trough where you rinsed him off?—give it to ther horses?" asked the Kid.

"Why not?" ventured the Old Man.

"It'll make 'em sick, sure. Better tell Charley ter draw it off an' set it for vinegar. We can't afford ter lose it, yer know."

"I should hate to use the vinegar made from *your* soakings," said the Old Man's wife.

"It would make better whisky than vinegar," suggested Shorty's wife; and so they chaffed each other, and laughed over the episode which came so near to being a mourning one, while the youngsters slept, forgetful and happy.

No, not exactly that.

At least, Toady was not asleep.

For to his mind he had not got half even with the other two youngsters for the fun they had made of him about that molasses accident, and so he lay awake trying to think how he should do so.

Finally he bethought him of a bottle of indelible marking-ink that he had seen his mother using, and taking it, he stole into the room occupied by the other two, and finding them fast asleep, with the light burning low, he proceeded to tattoo their faces in a most comical manner as they slept, and then he stole back into his own bed again, where he soon afterward went to sleep happy.

His revenge was complete, for it was more than a week before that ornamentation could be gotten off their handsome little faces, during which time Toady had the laugh all on his side, although it came very near breaking up the family, on account of the bickerings it produced.

A fine trio of kids they were, indeed!

Shorty and the Kid had many a laugh over that affair, but they were destined to have a greater one.

What would life be to those fellows if they could not have frequent laughs?

This one does not pertain to the country store exactly, but it does to the Old Man, who is one of the prominent characters in the story, and so, of course, is perfectly allowable. Besides, by this time the farm and store were so

nearly allied that they were almost one and the same thing.

You will recollect that I spoke, a few pages back, of my mentioning a bit of confidence that the Old Man reposed in me regarding a patent cow-milker that he intended buying, and that he particularly requested me to say nothing to either Shorty or the Kid about it, which I agreed not to do, knowing well enough that they would soon find out all about it.

Well, both Shorty and the Kid told me all about it not long afterward, and remembering yet how they laughed, I can hardly restrain my own risibles enough to write the matter out as it should be.

There is no nonsense about this. There really is such a machine or mechanical contrivance as a cow-milker, although not generally known or much in use.

It is probably the invention of some lazy genius as a labor-saving machine.

But those who are acquainted with the Old Man, especially in his farming capacity, know that he is just the sort of a sucker to be taken with such a thing.

Not that his cows could not be milked by hand, as they always had been, but he wanted to do things differently from other people, and at the same time encourage invention, the arts, and sciences.

Our readers will remember his purchases of new labor-saving inventions, and among them a patent hay-loader and unloader, by which he came very near losing his life.

But nothing short of actually losing it would keep him from buying anything that was novel, and that he could apply to farming, no matter how ridiculous or useless, so far as his farming was concerned.

The reason he didn't wish Shorty or the Kid to know anything about it was that Shorty had offered to bet that he would buy a cow-milker, and so he wanted to keep it from him until he had found it to be an entire and complete success, after which he didn't care who knew it.

It will be remembered that he had three Jersey cows of the first quality, and the rich milk they gave was enough to supply the household with all that was wanted, and to yield a good supply of butter and milk for the market, or for such neighbors as did not indulge in the luxury of cows.

The principle of the cow-milker is simply the one of suction or atmospheric pressure, and I have no need of entering upon an elaborate description of it.

Rubber tubes are applied to the cow's teats, the air in a small chamber exhausted, the pail set in position, and—there you are.

The Old Man kept it very quiet, and the day he resolved on trying it for the first time he told Pat that he would milk the cows that evening, and that he could attend to his other duties, which meant, of course, that he could remain longer in the field, and until milking time was over.

And so everything was propitious. There was nobody around but the family, and they seldom went to the barn, and there was nobody to interfere with his first testing of the patent cow-milker.

Yes, there were those tormenting "chips," but he could easily drive them away. He could send them down to the wharf and tell them some cock-and-bull story about what Shorty and the Kid were going to bring them on their return

from New York, whither they had been in their yacht Shorty, and so that was all right.

But he didn't see the youngsters around, for some reason or other. They were probably off at play somewhere, so it was just as well.

Indeed, he didn't know at what time Shorty was expected back, or whether he had really gone to New York or not. He simply knew that they had gone out for a sail in their yacht, but took it for granted that they had gone to New York, or at all events far enough away not to molest him.

It was a delightfully calm evening, in the latter part of June. The sun was only about an hour high; the hens were beginning to cast inquiring glances aloft, and the birds were finishing up their concert of the day, and down in the meadow the frogs were beginning to say "chang," and to take up the song that was being dropped by the feathered songsters.

In short, it was milking time.

The Old Man went down the lane, opened the gate, called the cows, and they followed him up to the barn-yard like tame sheep.

They were thoroughbred, well-fed cows, and were evidently perfectly content with their condition in life—to feed on sweet clover all day, and at night to render a liquid account in generous quarts of rich, unchalked milk.

The Old Man was very proud of them. They were so very gentle, so sleek and well-behaved.

But that was no reason why they should be treated always the same, or as their forecows had been treated. They were an improved breed of cows, and on that account should be made to blend with the latest improvements in milking.

So when he had them in the barn-yard, where they were always milked in summer, he brought out his patent cow-milker, and proceeded to couple it upon one of them.

She was a gentle creature, and would not harm a fly (if it was out of the reach of her tail), and so at first she didn't appear to notice anything strange.

She felt her big bag being relieved, which was very agreeable to her, and in that sort of ecstasy, which such a relief brings to the bovine tribe, she stood still a few moments, as though contemplating the pleasure she was both giving and receiving.

"Oh, no!" mused the Old Man, as he saw how nicely the machine was working. "Perhaps I am an old ass—perhaps I'm one of those old fossils who never make any advancement in this world. Why, a simple thing like this will paralyze the average farmer hereabouts, and even those rascally sons of mine would make fun of me if they saw it. But I have got to educate them up to it, to the advancement in life, then they will not have so many laughs on me as they have had. So, bossy, so; that's all right," he added to his cogitation, for the cow began to show signs of uneasiness.

She looked around as though on the point of asking: "What sort of a milk is this you are giving me?" when she evidently became to a certain degree confused, and perhaps demoralized, at not seeing anybody near her.

Who shall say what were the feelings of that gentle

bovine, as she looked around upon that machine that was so quietly robbing her of her milk?

But cows are very quick to tumble if there is anything wrong, especially when they are knocked in the head. Yet it is different with the thoroughbred Jersey cow. They tumble quicker.

At all events, this one seemed to.

Indeed, she should have been stalled, if not blindfolded, for the operation at first, but the Old Man relied upon their extreme gentleness.

But when she saw that machine at work upon her, she gave a jump which freed her from it, and then she whirled around and charged upon it savagely, head down and tail up.

Nor was she alone, for her mates seemed to understand that there was something wrong going on, and when the Old Man rushed in to save his machine, they seemed to forget all the respect due him, and charged upon him with bellows and erected tails.

"So, bossy, so!" cried the Old Man.

But he didn't have time to enter into any further argument or protest with them, for by this time they had tramped his machine into the soft mire of the barn-yard, and were chasing him around it.

"Help, help! Murder, murder!" he cried, and he would have whistled for Carlo, the big Newfoundland, if they had given him a chance.

As it happened, the kids were just then playing with the faithful animal, when he suddenly paused, on hearing the Old Man's cry, and with three or four great bounds, he leaped over the barn-yard fence and caught one of the infuriated cows by the nose just as she was about to push her horns into his master, she having him down upon the ground.

The youngsters followed, of course, and so did the servants and the three wives, who had heard the Old Man's cry.

So also came Shorty and the Kid upon the scene just then, having returned from their sail.

The excitement was intense, but Carlo was the hero of the hour, for he not only dragged the cow away from the Old Man, but his presence discouraged the other two, who stood at bay, regarding him and probably wondering what it all meant anyhow.

The kids and the women screamed, of course, although the youngsters thought naturally that the fight was between the dog and the cows, while the women folks felt sure that something dreadful had happened to the Old Man, because he was covered with barn-yard filth, his eyes were bulging out of his head, and he was puffing like a poor locomotive bucking against a big snow-drift.

"What's the matter, dad?" asked Shorty.

"What yer been tryin' ter do?" asked the Kid.

"Do pray come out of that filthy place, and tell us what the matter is," cried the Old Man's wife.

"Some new experiment, I'll bet a dollar," said Shorty, and this was the first thing that seemed to rouse him.

The Kid leaped over the fence and pulled the trampled cow-milker out of the filth.

"That's it! A cow milker! I knew he'd do it," cried

Shorty, and as the Kid held it up they both almost fell down with laughter.

"You wretches! you don't care how badly your poor father is hurt, so long as you can get a laugh out of his misfortune. You are a pair of villains!" cried the Old Man's wife.

"Put him back an' let 'em fight," said the Old Man's hopeful, and this nearly broke both his parents' hearts.

But the old experimenter was finally rescued and taken to the house a badly broken up man.

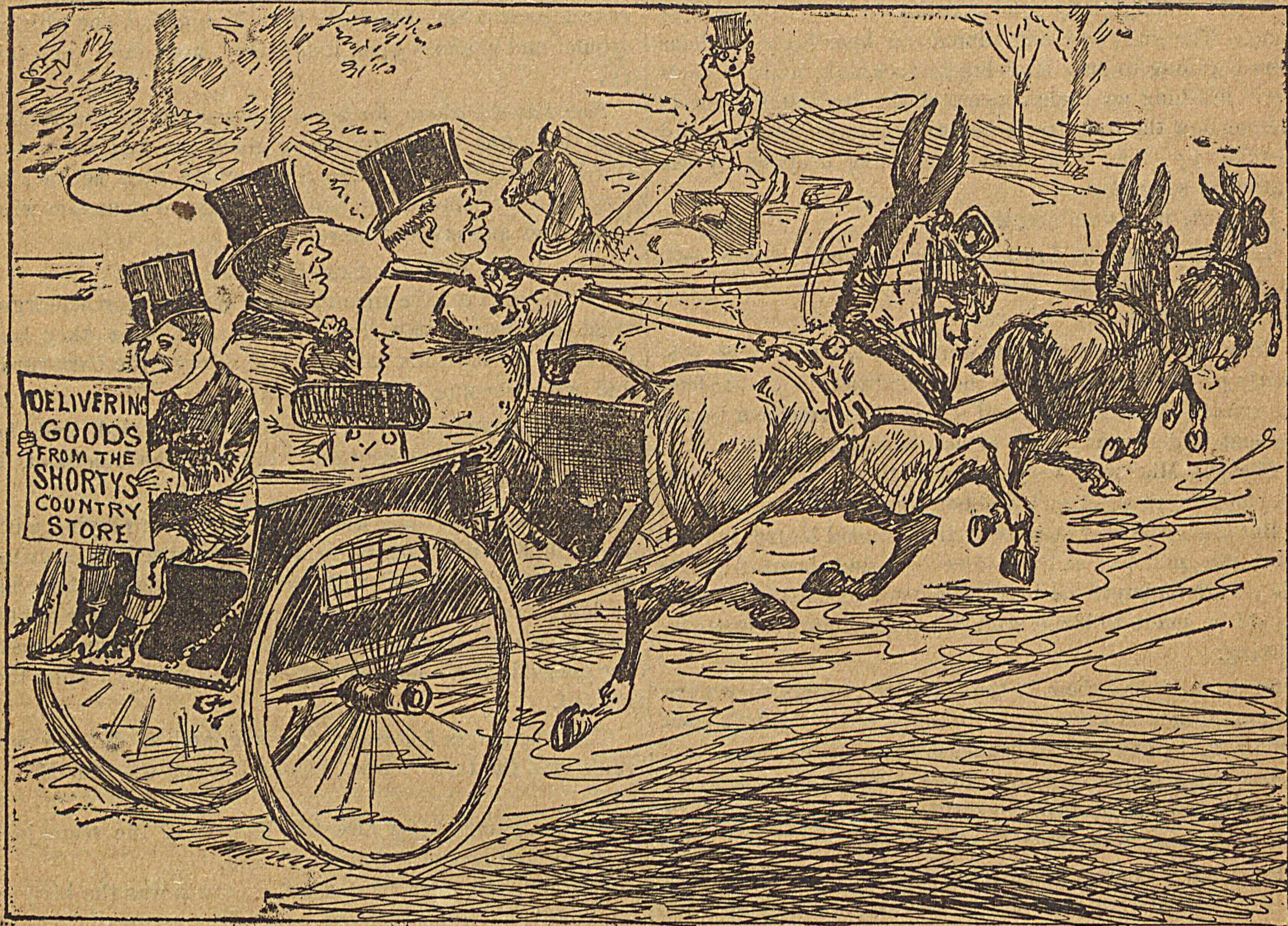
could do to accomplish it, because the otherwise gentle cows were wild with excitement now.

What a racket it was!

And because it was so funny, and because the Old Man was not seriously hurt, all hands gradually got into the laugh at his expense, and the old farmer was *sick*.

What confounded luck pursued him in all his undertakings for the advancement of science? What did it mean? Wasn't he regular-made?

The Old Man could stand almost anything better than a



He painted a sign large enough to be easily read, and one day when he was acting the tiger for the Old Man and Shorty he held this sign up to view: "Delivering goods from the Shortys' Country Store."

Shorty and the Kid lingered over the wreck of that cow-milker, taking turns at falling down and roaring with laughter.

Oh, wasn't it a Yorkshire pudding for that pair of teasing jokers!

"I knew it! I knew he would couple a cow-milker to those poor beasts, but he has got the worst of it, as usual," said Shorty.

"Look at it!" and again they yelled with laughter as the Kid held it up, and although their wives wanted to join them, they dared not do so until they knew whether the Old Man was seriously hurt or not.

But what a racket it was for Shorty and the Kid! They laughed until their stomachs ached, and when Pat came up from his work in the field, and they told him to finish the milking without asking any questions, he had all he

laugh at his expense. He had tried to keep this thing quiet, but now it was known to everybody in his household.

Even the little kids appeared to know all about it—the servants knew all about it—and he felt as though it would be a good thing to die.

"Confound the milking-machines! Yes, confound all the new-fangled ideas; they seem to have been brought out just to make me unhappy. No more of them for me. I am no hog; I know when I have got enough; one has got to draw the line somewhere. I draw it at cow-milkers," he mused, while alone.

As I said before, Shorty and the Kid were very much tickled over the molasses racket, but this one of the cow-milker took the rag right off the bush, and each one of them laughed at least five pounds of flesh off their bones

before they got through with this racket of the Old Man's cow-milkers.

But how sick the Old Man was!

He refused to come down-stairs to meet the family for three days, hoping, probably, that the matter would be forgotten in time, or that the laugh would not be so severe upon him.

But those mischievous boys of his, Shorty and the Kid, were not content to let things die out in that way, and so they repaired the cow-milker and took it up to his room.

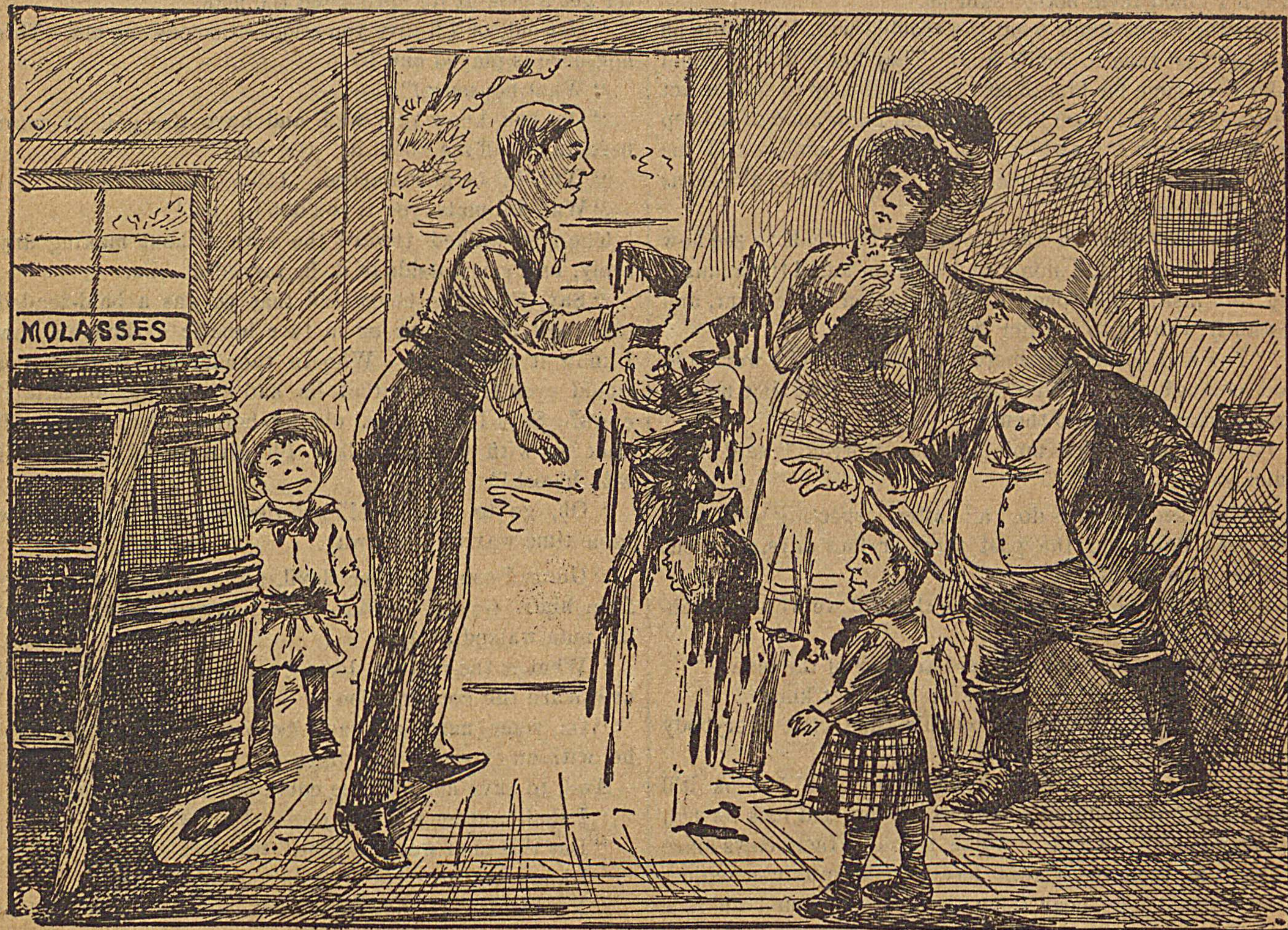
It was a terrible dose, but he had to swallow it, as he had swallowed many more on account of his unnatural enthusiasm.

But he wanted a double-barreled shotgun.

Nothing but family blood could wipe out this awful give-away.

Everybody for miles around had heard about the Old Man's mishap, and were laughing over it as only tickled country people can laugh.

Yes, the Old Man wanted blood.



He held him up by the ankle to allow the molasses to drain off, for he had not yet forgotten the lessons of thrift and economy which had been taught him by old Dubb. He mustn't waste the molasses on any account.

This made him wild, and he called loudly for a shotgun wherewith to break up his family, but no one volunteered to bring him one, although one of the "chips" offered to lend him his pop-gun.

It put the Old Man back several days, and when he finally did get out and went down to the store to see how things were getting along, he found that confounded old cow-milking machine put up on the counter, and on a card that was attached to it was written:

"Mr. Burwick's patent cow-milker. Warranted to milk a cow in three minutes—if she don't get disgusted and turn on you. This 'milker' is for sale. Mr. Burwick is slowly recovering."

If it wanted anything besides what had already happened to break the Old Man's heart, this was just what did it.

Family blood.

Blood, to satisfy the unnatural longings in his heart, occasioned by misfortune, and assisted into a township laugh by his son and grandson.

It was in his heart to make two widows and two fatherless boys.

The gallows had no terrors for him now, and the future was to be one unrelenting grin.

But Shorty and the Kid knew enough to keep out of the way for a few days, and so, after placing the cow-milker on exhibition, they quietly went on board their yacht and started for New York, leaving word that they should be gone a week.

It was three days before the Old Man got out after his mishap, and it was not until then that he found out what

his boys had done, and it was then that he yearned for a shotgun and fillicidal blood.

After destroying that cow-milker utterly and giving Charley Smith a terrible blowing up for allowing his rascally sons to put it on exhibition, he started for home, wild with rage.

"Where are those rascals?" he demanded, and was told that they had gone to New York.

"Ah! the villains! it is lucky for them that they got out of my reach. They knew it would be only simple justice if I killed them both," said he.

But the wives knew what the trouble was, and made no attempt just then to pacify him. They knew that it would take some time for him to cool off sufficiently to talk or act with reason, and those little kids also knew enough to keep out of his sight for awhile, although they understood the joke, and among themselves voted it a big thing, almost as good as a circus.

The wrathful old man went down into the fields to see how the men were getting along, and he even found them laughing, and instantly suspected that it was on his account, and instantly wanted to murder *them*.

"You had better pay more attention to your work and do less laughing," said he, and it was the first time he had ever spoken angrily to them.

"Sure, sur, we're moindin' our worruk," said Pat, quickly.

"Well, see that you do," and after inspecting what they had been doing for the past three or four days, he went sullenly homeward.

"Troth, it's sore he is, and he thought we were a-laughin' at him," said Pat.

"Just as we war doing," said another of the men.

"Yes, but he only suspected it; he didn't know."

"Well, I guess he knows by this time what everybody is laughing at. Fool if he don't."

"Well, begorra, it war a great joke, an' I think it'll cure him of new-fangled machines. Why, bad luck ter me, it's as much as me loife is worth ter milk them cows since he went at them with that bloody ould milkin'-machine. Ther moment I go near them they wheel around an' face me ter say if I've that machine wid me," and again they all laughed so loud that the Old Man heard them and gnashed his three or four remaining teeth.

"But them sons av his is ther divils," continued Pat. "Sure, they're all the whoile playin' some joke or other on the ould man, that is, when he isn't playin' them on himself. Faix, yees shud have been here last summer," said he, and he proceeded to relate to his fellow-workmen some of the incidents.

As for the Old Man, he stopped on his way home and took a look at the cows.

But the moment they saw him they gave a bellow, erected their tails, and ran away from him as fast as they could go.

Even his cows avoided him, and if they were not laughing at him, they were manifesting their emotion in quite as marked a manner.

And this made him sick some more.

On arriving at the farm-house, he found one of his neighbors waiting for him.

"Ah, Neighbor Burwick, how de do?" he saluted.

"Quite well," replied the Old Man, and instantly he wondered if he had heard about that cow-milker.

"I hear tell that yu've got a new-fangled thing here called a cow-milker, an' I'll be gosh-darned if I wouldn't like to see it," said the farmer.

"What! Confound you, get out of this, or I will set my dog on you!" roared the Old Man, turning red and puffing up with indignation. "Git!"

"Why, what's ther matter, neighbor? I only wanted ter get a look at it!" protested the man.

"Get out, or I'll give you a look at something else. This nonsense is played out."

"What nonsense?"

"Oh, you know very well, and have the gall to come here and chaff me about it. Get out!"

"Wal, I'll be gosh-darned. I don't understand it."

"Wal, I'll make you if you don't. Git!"

The man walked toward the gate without making any reply, but once outside of it, he turned on him.

"Say, I've allus hearn tell that yu was a bald-headed old crank, an' oughter be in ther lunatic asylum, an' now I know it for sartin. Who in thunder but a darn ijot would ever tell round that he had a machine for milkin' cows? Say, I've got an old lap-horned cow, an' if yu'll milk her with yer cow-milker I'll give yu fifty dollars—I will, b'gosh!"

"Oh, go to the devil!" growled the Old Man, at the same time waving him away.

"Guess I come tu ther devil, an' now I'm going away from him. Go tu thunder, yu old sawed-off crank!" and the man walked away.

"What is the matter, Josiah?" asked his wife, who had overheard the conversation.

"Oh, some more of that bloody old cow-milker," said he, with an expression of disgust.

And, to save her life, she could not repress a smile.

"I shall murder somebody yet—I know I shall."

"But this man was all right," said she.

"I know better. He came here to chaff me."

"Not at all. He lives in the next township, and said he was sent here by Mr. Pad."

"What!" he almost screamed.

"He said Peter Pad sent him here to see it."

"Great Scott! he'll hear all about the confounded thing, and write it up, as sure as guns!" and uttering a heart-rending groan he toppled over backward, and sat down in a large pan of ripe tomatoes.

"Mercy on me, Josiah Burwick, what have you done?" she cried, running to his assistance, while the youngsters set up a great shout and ran out of sight.

"Confound the tomatoes!" howled the Old Man, as his wife assisted him to arise. "There is always something in the way—always something happening to me."

"But it is your own fault."

"Oh, yes, it is always my own confounded fault. It's my fault that I'm alive, I suppose, and I wish I was as dead as a smoked herring," he moaned, as he swept some of the mashed tomatoes from his clothing.

"It certainly isn't your fault that you are alive, for you have had accidents enough happen to you to kill ten aver-

age men. And yet you will never learn by your experience, and I suppose will keep on until you succeed in making a widow of me."

The Old Man made no reply. His heart was too full for utterance, and so he walked away, and went up to his chamber to change his clothes, after which he sat down for a quiet think all by himself.

It wasn't a very pleasant entertainment.

"I am an old ass."

That was the first conclusion he arrived at.

"There's nobody to blame but myself."

This was his second comment.

"In my endeavors to do something to astonish my neighbors, I have generally succeeded only in astonishing myself. Yes, I am an old ass. That man was right. I have proved it a dozen times over. Those boys only did what was natural, after all. But if there had been no confounded cow-milker, there would have been no chance for them to work their joke. But there'll be no more cow-milkers. There'll be no more new-fangled notions of any sort, for I am not a hog—I know when I have got enough, and I'll shoot the next patent-agent that approaches me with any confounded labor-saver. Hereafter everything on this farm has got to be done in the old-fashioned way. There I felt sure that I should astonish Peter Pad; but now I feel sure that he will astonish me if I don't contrive some way to buy him off. Come to think of it, who could help laughing at me? I'm a four-ply donkey and a yard wide."

After musing thus for half an hour or so, he "swore off." No more improvements for him.

He busied himself about the place that day and the next, without going to the store, and finally he got over the worst of his indignation and came to be more like his genial self again.

But those youngsters were not inclined to let the matter drop, although they were very cautious in the Old Man's presence, for there was still a cloud on his brow, and their mothers had cautioned them against making any allusion to the matter.

But they were laying low for Shorty and the Kid to be at the wharf when they returned to tell them all about the Old Man's sitting down in the tomatoes.

And the comical way, and the laughing enthusiasm with which they related the Old Man's misfortunes, made the two fathers laugh heartily, and showed conclusively that the little rascals were chips of the old blocks, as they themselves were chips of the original, the Old Man.

And before they had reached home Pat had told them the result of placing the cow-milker on exhibition. So they found quite as much to laugh at as they had all the while expected to find.

But they all had their laugh out before they reached home, and Shorty had cautioned the boys against laughing or saying anything more about the matter. Indeed, he saw that they were getting along altogether too fast, and would be taking a hand in "working" the Old Man if not held in check.

The Old Man didn't receive them with any great degree of cordiality, but as they had brought him several presents from New York, they soon had a grin on his fat round

mug, which chased away everything that looked like shadows there.

Peace and happiness reigned in the Shorty homestead once more, and while the Old Man attended to his farm, Shorty and the Kid gave considerable of their time to the store.

The Fourth of July was celebrated with quite as much earnestness and enthusiasm as it had been the year before, although there had been no photograph taken, with its comical central figures, as there had been on that occasion.

But the youngsters had all the firecrackers they wanted, and in the evening there was music and fireworks for an hour or more, which delighted the entire neighborhood that had flocked upon the spacious lawn to witness what to them was a wonderful exhibition.

And so the days passed, and everybody was happy, not only at the Shorty mansion, but in all the neighborhood round about, for the Shortys had become great favorites therein, and the fame of "The Burwick Square Store" spread all about, and the cheapness of things compared with what they were when old Dubb ruled the village roost made everybody comparatively happy.

And besides that, what they had seen of the three original Shortys, their handsome little wives and bright boys, not only endeared the whole family to them, but on learning their history and the comical relationship existing between them all owing to their mixed marriages, they were not only heroes, but a source of amusement for the honest farmers, who spent much time in reading about them, and wondering who Peter Pad was, and trying to figure out the relationship existing between the different members of the family.

But ahead of even all these points of interest was the fact of their all being *rich*. That is all that is required to make a person interesting and talked about on Long Island, as well as in many other places.

Talk about charity covering a multitude of sins! Riches can double discount charity, and give her points besides.

Especially on Long Island.

So you see it is not strange that our friends were so highly thought of by their neighbors, for they were not only rich and socially interesting, but they were charitable besides. They all held "royal flushes."

And all three of them enjoyed that country store, but more especially its customers, and some of the village characters, for characters some of them were indeed, and Shorty took an especial delight in drawing them out and getting them to tell yarns.

For instance, there was Ben Fordham, a half-bum, living from hand to mouth, but who was always on the point of making "big money" on some speculation or other, but who somehow never brought anything to a head, and yet always had a good excuse for not doing so. Something was always happening.

And there was Bill Jones—a full-fledged country store lounge. His wife did dress-making, and supported the family while he loafed around the store, and was always ready to "take something" whenever anybody asked him, which had been quite often since the advent of the Shortys.

He was possessed of a dull, droll wit; was always ready to tell a story or listen to one, especially if there was the slightest probability of there being a drink at the end of it. He had never been known to do an honest day's work in his life, his father having supported him in idleness until he married the village dress-maker, after which his living was assured, of course.

Then there was old Shep Hulse—a retired sea-captain. Nobody knew exactly how much he was worth, but judging from his own stories, he was at least a millionaire, for he was a boss liar all around the board, and would even hint at smuggling and piratical jobs which brought him fabulous sums.

Next came "Clam" Baylis—a clam-digger, and a man who knew more about the weather, past, present, and to come, than "Old Probabilities" himself. Indeed, he took especial delight in flying in the face of that august personage, and showing up his mistakes and weak points. He was sixty years of age, and knew it all.

He had one local rival, however, in the person of a man about his own age, who got his living by fishing in Long Island Sound. He was known to everybody as "Old Bluefish," and it is doubtful if one-half the people knew that he possessed any other name.

And then there was old "Shank" Snell, a man who had been of considerable consequence in days past and gone, for before the branch railroad had been built he used to drive the stage from a station on the trunk line, and of course was the bearer and possessor of all the news in the world, and in those days he used to play the autocrat and dispense it only to whom he liked, or to those who asked him to take some "hot drops."

Besides these there were several other odd characters, as there always are to be found around a country store, and it was the delight of Shorty and the Kid to get them together, and set one upon the other in some way touching their individual weaknesses, and even the Old Man was not slow in encouraging such encounters, for when he was not teased or worried he liked to have fun as well as either his son or grandson did, as will be remembered by those who have read of him in other books and adventures of the Shortys.

For instance, nearly all of the characters I have described were seated on the piazza of the store one evening, when Shorty and the Kid sauntered up in their yachting-suits and saluted them.

They of course saluted in turn, for the little fellows were great guns in Little Neck.

"How are you all this evening?" asked Shorty, and of course they said they were first-rate, and made room for them to be seated in the group.

"Been a warm day," suggested the Kid.

"Wal, yes, sorter warm," drawled Shep Hulse, "but nothink like what we have in *winter* down in the tropics."

"Indeed! I guess winter in the tropics never bested ninety in the shade," said Shorty.

"Oh, nonsense! But you've never traveled."

"No! Been round the world and in every one of the climates," replied Shorty, lighting a cigar.

"Been ter ther West Indies?"

"No."

"Been ter ther Amazon?"

"Nix."

"Then you don't want ter tork. Why, I've seen it so hot in Jamaica an' Martinique right in ther middle of winter that yer could light a cigar from a pebble-stun that lay in ther sun," and then he thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest, crossed his legs, and looked around to the others as much as to ask if they thought Shorty wanted any more.

"Did you ever do it?" asked Shorty.

"Many a time."

"How did you hold the pebble?"

"Why, with tongs, of course. Everybody carries tongs down in the tropics."

"How high have you ever seen the thermometer down there, Mr. Hulse?"

"Don't have any down there."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"No use. They melt."

"Melt!"

"Bile over."

"What!"

"Fact. It's no uncommon sight ter see ther murcury in our barometers bilin' down there in mid-winter."

"Well, how is it in summer?"

"Never dared ter stay there. I did stay up ter ther first of May onct, but when I saw the tar a-bilin' in the seams of my ship, and ther oakum a-breakin' out inter a blaze every few minutes, I cut loose, and sailed north."

"Well, I should say it was about time. But how was it on the Amazon river?"

"Wal, it's a little better, 'cos it's more moist. But it's a terrible country,"

"How so?"

"'Cos things grow so."

"Grow big?"

"Big! Wal, I should cough!"

"Got a cold?" and the others laughed.

"No, but I should cough if they didn't grow big down there. Why, right on the Amazon river, I've seen lily-eaves a hundred feet in diameter."

"Oh, come off!"

"No, siree."

"Make 'em seventy-five."

"No, sir, I'm on ther *truth*, I am."

"Well, how big were the lilies?"

"Oh, ten feet across, sometimes."

"Much scent to them?"

"Scent! Wal, I should say so! Why, yer can't sail through it, it's so thick. Trees down there grow a thousand feet high."

"What for?"

"Have ter do it in order ter get up so as ther sun can get at 'em, for ther other trees crowd up ter nine hundred, and those would have no show for sunshine if they didn't go higher."

"Ever see any snakes down there?"

"Snakes! Wal, I should hiccough!" he exclaimed.

"Got wind on your stomach?" asked Shorty, and then there was another laugh, for they saw that he was simply guying him.

"No, but snakes! Say, Mr. Burwick, don't ever go down there," said Hulse, earnestly.

"Dangerous?"

"Dangerous! Yer'll never have another sound night's sleep if yer do. I know it from experience."

"Don't sleep well?"

"I'm woke up for life."

"How so?"

"Seen them big snakes—can't forget 'em."

"How big?"

"Wal, now, I'm goin' ter give it ter yu straight, but I've seen a snake's head up in ther top of one of those thousand-foot trees an' chopped off ten foot of his tail that lay on ther ground an' hadn't got up yet."

"Kill the snake?"

"Kill it! Why, ther monster didn't mind it at all. But ther tail made it lively for me."

"Indeed! How?"

"Wal, now, yer want ter believe this, for it's as good as preachin'."

"All right. Let her go."

"Are yer all listnin'?"

"Yes," said the party.

"For yer goin' ter get a 'stonisher now."

"Give it to us gently," suggested Shorty.

"Wal, yes, but would you believe it—that tail didn't die."

"What!" they all exclaimed.

"No, sir. I watched it, an' less'n ten minutes by ther watch a new head grew out on the big end of ther tail-piece I had chopped off, an' whut's more, it turned on me an' druv me out ther woods. It did, by thunder!" he said, emphasizing the words by spanking his big hands together.

They all looked at Shorty to hear what he would say.

He drew a long breath. Indeed, he had nearly lost it entirely, for this was unquestionably the greatest lie he had ever heard from the greatest liar he had ever known.

"Captain Hulse, you lasso the cake; you throw the line right over the biscuit; you corral the bun and capture the sponge-cake," said he.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the old captain.

"It is, hey?" demanded "Clam" Baylis, savagely.

"Yes, of course it is," said Hulse.

"Cap'n Hulse, I've got nothin' agin yu much, only I think yer the gol-darndest liar that ever got on top of Long Island," said he, slapping his thigh.

"Oh, no," said Shorty, holding up his hands, and the others replied:

"Oh, certainly not!"

"What's ther matter with yu?" asked the captain.

"Oh, yer allus spinnin' hot yarns."

"I can prove all I say."

"I'll bet yer don't know anythin' 'bout hot weather, ter begin with," said he, earnestly.

"Oh, p'r'aps not. But p'r'aps yu do."

"Yes, I du; I know somethin' 'bout hot weather right here on Long Island, an' if I didn't I wouldn't tell such gol-darned lies as yu du 'bout it."

"Bah!" was the captain's only reply.

"Well, 'Clam,' how hot have you ever known it?" asked Shorty, bound to draw out all the fun there was.

"Hot!" he grunted, and then he pushed in a new chew of fine-cut. "Say, Sam Smith," said he, addressing a bystander, after a moment's silence.

"Sir ter yu," said the man.

"Now, mind, I'm goin' ter prove what I say," said he, turning to Shorty. "Say, Sam, yu remember five year ago this summer?"

"Oh, yes."

"Five year ago this very day, I think. Wal, du yu remember me sellin' your folks some b'iled clams one evenin' when I come in off ther beds?"

"Yes, I think I du," mused Smith, and as he had never been known to lie, they all looked at him.

"All right. Yu remember how hot it was?"

"Yes; it was a very hot summer all through."

"Wal, I should say so. Now, I never sed anythink about them clams, only that they'd just been taken outer ther water. Yer see, I've got a likely family growin' up, an' so I'm very careful what I say; but when Cap'n Hulse says about how hot he has seen it down in Jimaky, I want tu just tell him that Long Island can jus' lay right over that rum island, 'specially sometimes for hot weather."

"Bah!" ejaculated the captain.

"Just yu hold yer hosses, will yu? I never sed anythink about them b'iled clams, for, as I sed afore, I've got a likely family growin' up, but rather'n see Long Island laid over by a nigger island, I'll just up an' tell yer how 'twas 'bout them clams. I had been tongsin' all day, an' war nearly dead with ther heat, when I concluded to row in shore an' wait till it got cooler. Wal, for a short-cut, I started across Sammises' Flats. Ther tide war down so that ther water wan't more'n a foot deep on ther flats, an' I noticed an awful lot of bubbles a-comin' up from ther bottom. I put my hand in, an' took it right out ag'in, it war so hot. So I thort as how I'd see how it 'fected ther hard clams, an' scooped up a lot on 'em with my tongs. They were all wide open, an' I found every clam on 'em b'iled. Fact, by thunder'n lightnin'!"

There was a moment's silence, when they all broke out laughing, and the old clam-digger was mad because he thought they didn't believe him.

"Good!" said Shorty. "I believe you."

"Wal, you'd better, for it's preachin'."

"Wal, I think ther devils preachin'," said Hulse.

"What!"

"I think it's all right, only that it's a gol-darned lie, that's all."

"Ask Sam Smith. He knows, an' won't lie, no more'n I would."

"Well, that entitles you to some bitters; come right in, all hands," said Shorty, leading the way to the back room. "I want to drink with the two most colossal liars in the world."

"Me too," put in the Kid.

"Oh, wal, maybe yu don't believe it?"

"I believe what I said," replied Shorty.

"Ask Sam Smith."

"That's all right, old man. Some day, after I get over this, I am going to offer a reward for the biggest lie that

can be told, and I don't think the day will be cold enough for either of you two to get left."

"Let's hire him to lie against 'Ed' about Peter Pad's farm," suggested the Kid.

"Oh, no! He's an old man, and Ed would make him sick in one inning. Well, here goes!" said Shorty, and the next moment there was a suspicious smacking of lips, after which they all repaired to the front piazza again.

It was dark by this time, but the lights in the store windows enabled the party to see each other, and to note if any one of them blushed. After lighting a fresh cigar, Shorty threw his short stumpy legs up on the balustrade, and made tobacco-smoke rings in the air over his head.

"Well, how is it with you, Bill Jones; have you ever seen any very hot weather?" Shorty finally asked, turning to the old ex-stage-driver.

"Wal, no, nothink ter speak on. But I've seen some purty sudden changes in ther weather here on this island in my life-time," he drawled.

"How sudden?"

"Wal, I remember bein' caught in a big snow-storm once while comin' ter Little Neck, an' afore I got here ther snow' all melted, an' ther water was a-bilin' right in ther middle of ther road," said he, soberly.

"That's what I like," exclaimed Shorty. "If a man starts to tell a lie, let him make it short, and as big as possible. I hate these long, unreasonable lies. Bill Jones, you are entitled to a cake."

He would much rather have been told that he was entitled to a drink; but he said nothing, and quietly rested on his oars.

It only remained for "Shank" Snell to show what he could do, although there had been a time, in the old stage-driving days, when it would not have done to even insinuate that "Shank" could or would tell a lie. But the branch railroad had changed everything, and the man who was once the oracle was about on a level with Bill Jones now—a nobody.

The Kid suggested that he tell them some of the points of his experience, but he held back.

"Know anything about hot weather?" asked Shorty.

"No, all weather's ther same ter me," he sighed.

"What do you think of the three yarns that have been told here this evening?"

"Oh, they're all right, I guess. I know 'Clam' Baylis wouldn't lie. Bill Jones is a little careless sometimes, but he means well. An' as for Cap'n Hulse, I don't think he'd lie about a hundred-foot lily-pad or a thousand-foot snake. We haven't seen so much as he has. We don't any on us know what's on th' arth until we've seen it. Thar's whar the cap'n has got the dead wood on us landlubbers. Mine's been all hosses all my life most," he added, with a sigh.

"Well, what's the matter with horses? Give us something about horses."

"Oh, I don't know much. Don't happen ter think of anything now, unless it is about ole Lightnin' Charley, as we used tu call him," said he, in a lazy sort of a way.

"Why did they give him that name?"

"Wal, it war on account of his beatin' lightnin' once," he said, indifferently.

"Beating lightning! Tell us about it," said Shorty, sniffing another lie.

"Wal, thar isn't much ter tell. Yer see, I used ter drive that ole hoss once ter my stage, years ago, afore the railroad war built, an' this happened just arter they had finished ther telegraph tu this place. It war the time of ther President's message. Yer see, I had it all printed in ther New York papers an' got it at ther station just as they begun ter send it here on the telegraph. But ther wires war new, an' I guess ther lightnin' warn't greased, so me'n Charley got here ahead on it. That's why they gave him ther name of Lightnin' Charley," said he, quietly.

It was a dim, uncertain light they sat in. One or two lights in the store had been turned out, leaving the piazza in a sort of half-light—a social mist.

Not a word was spoken.

Captain Hulse, the boss liar, had quietly gone to sleep, knowing that there was no one who could down him.

Silence reigned all around.

"Shank" Snell looked around on the party.

No one seemed to notice him.

Everybody appeared to be asleep or dreaming.

Then he got mad.

"Say! if I had told you fellows a blamed lie like those other fellows did, yer'd a said somethin'. That's what a chap gets for bein' honest an' truthful. I'm done!"

And yet nobody spoke.

Shorty and the Kid pulled away on their cigars, but they were mute, although they nudged each other.

They had been reared as Washingtonians, who could not tell a lie, and of course they were paralyzed now. Didn't understand it.

"Shank" Snell looked around once more.

"Say, I'll bet yer a lot of duffers, high tide or low. What's ther matter with yer anyway? Maybe yer think I'm a gol-darned liar. I'm bettin' that I'm ther only truth-teller in ther party. Say, wake up! Ther story's done. What's ther matter with yer anyway? All gone ter sleep? Well, this is ther worst! Say, I'm goin' home. Charley's shuttin' up. What! not another drink? Say, Mr. Burwick—Mr. Shortness—are yer asleep? Come, now, this is too much. How about that night-cap?" and he touched Shorty on the shoulder.

"Eh?" and Shorty turned to him.

"Well!"

"What?" asked Shorty, taking his feet down from their elevated roost.

"Upon my word!"

"What about?"

"Well, say, have yer been asleep?"

"Let me see. Guess not, since last night," replied Shorty, yawning and stretching.

Snell was puzzled. He turned on the other fellows, but all seemed to have taken their cue from Shorty.

"Say," he said, to Ben Fordham.

"Eh?"

"What's ther matter with yer, anyhow?"

"Oh, I'm sleepy, it's so hot."

Then he turned on Bill Jones.

"Say, Bill, what's ther matter?"

"Oh, nozzin, guess. Why?"

"Thunder and lightnin'!" he growled, and then he turned to "Clam" Baylis. "Say, 'Clam,' what's ther matter?"

"Eh? Oh, I'm all right," growled "Clam."

"Oh, you be, hey? I'm glad yer told me so. Say, 'Blue-fish,' what's ther matter with *you*?" he asked, turning to the lone fisherman.

"Me? Oh, I was dreaming. Yes, I war dreamin' just now that I caught a million bluefish."

"Come off!"

"Not a bit! I counted 'em."

"Pshaw!"

"Fact. I'm ther only man in ther party as hasn't told a lie ter-night. I dreamed that I was trollin' for bluefish an' got a 'jump.' I thort I commenced ter haul in, an' that all ther bluefish in ther Sound got a notion that thar was goin' ter be a circus an' they wanted ter go ter it. So they all caught on," he mused.

"Caught on! How?"

"Caught on ter each other's tails, an' so I pulled 'em in, one arter another, till I'd got in ther whole million," said the old fisherman, and then he got up, stretched himself, and then said he guessed he'd go home, and started to do it.

Then Shep Hulse yawned and threw out his arms slowly, said "Ah-r!" and without anything further started off into the darkness.

"Well, good-night," said "Clam" Baylis, and he sauntered off toward home.

"Thunder!" exclaimed "Shank."

"Good-night all," said Bill Jones; but he said it with regret, thinking there was another drink.

"Be good to yourselves, gents," put in Ben Fordham, and he vanished.

Charley Smith had the store closed by this time.

"Good-night, 'Shank,' said tne Kid, shaking the dumfounded man by the hand, after which he waddled away into the darkness.

"Well, say," said Shank, turning to Shorty.

"Good-night, 'Shank;' see you again before long, I hope," and Shorty seized the hand so lately shaken by the Kid and shook it heartily.

"Well, say," murmured "Shank."

"Good-night, old man," and Shorty was also gone away into the darkness.

Charley Smith slammed the front store door, tried it to see if it was all right, and without noticing whether there was anybody on the piazza or not, waltzed toward home, leaving "Shank" all alone in the darkness.

"Wal, I'll be gol-darned tu gol-darnation, if this don't bite the biscuit!" he growled, as he made his way clumsily into the street. "This is the worst shake I ever 'sperienced. Wonder what was ther marter with ther gang, anyhow? They never seemed to think about a night-cap," and muttering to himself, he blundered home.

That was a sample of a "store night," when Shorty and the Kid took it into their heads to meet the village characters there. But this "chill" on old "Shank" was new, and appeared to have been worked spontaneously.

They all caught on to Shorty's snap, and worked it out first-rate, knowing that a "nip" some other time would

be the reward for humoring him now and giving old "Shank" the cold vibrations.

It took him a week to get over it, and to possess himself of nerve enough to make his appearance at the store again, and then he sort of sauntered in as though it had been on his way, and he had just dropped in.

The Shortys were off on their yacht, and there was nobody around but Bill Jones, and he did not feel very lively, seeing that there was nobody around who would possibly "set 'em up."

"Say, Bill, what *was* that ther other night?" "Shank" finally asked, as they sat on the piazza, and vainly looked for an "angel."

"What was what—when—what night?" asked Bill, for he could afford to be brusque to a fellow-bummer.

"Why, that night when the Shortys and we were all here a-tellin' stories. Remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, what about it, anyhow?" he asked, for he had never been able to condense it.

"Give it up, 'Shank,'" grunted Bill.

"But how did yer all get out that way?"

"Oh, all paralyzed, I guess."

"Git out! How?"

"By your darned lie."

"Pshaw! I was ther only man that spoke ther truth that night," he protested.

"What! Good-night, 'Shank,'" and before he could enter a protest Bill Jones had gone.

He really didn't want to go, but he saw no likelihood of getting treated, and so he could afford to be dignified.

"Shank" Snell sat there awhile longer and ruminated. He couldn't understand it, but he appeared to be regarded as a liar, even by those whom he knew to be such, and he finally began to think that it was time for him to swear off and learn to tell the truth, so he sauntered home sober that night from the country store with his mind made up to turn over a new leaf.

It was Saturday night.

The Old Man was at the store, quietly taking things in, and receiving the friendly greetings of the villagers who came for their purchases.

The good old fellow was happy because he saw that he had made others so, and because he was at the head of a happy family, and a farm that was doing wonders.

It was only a few weeks before the county fair at Mineola, and he thought he knew who was sure to take the prizes on several things, so he felt like a lord of the land.

Ben Fordham was there and having a quiet talk with Charley Smith, whenever he got an opportunity on account of customers, and all because he wanted credit.

So he was referred to the Old Man by Charley, as the easiest way of getting rid of him.

"I only want a few days credit," said he, going over to the Old Man. "In less than six months I shall be worth a million of dollars, and then you know—— See?"

"Well, yes," mused the Old Man.

"Happen to be short just now, as all good men are liable to be. See?"

"Certainly."

"Tell Charley to give me what I want to-night and I'll make it ail right," said he.

"Got into a big thing?"

"Well, rather. I won't say just what it is now, but if you see me six weeks from now, you will see me riding in a chariot—horses, servants, everything."

"I really hope so, Mr. Fordham," said the Old Man, and he meant it.

"Oh, you'll see it. Just tell Charley to let me have what I want to-night and charge it."

"Certainly," and without doubt or hesitation, the honest Old Man told his clerk to give Mr. Fordham all the credit he wanted.

That was all that was needed for Charley Smith, but he had his thoughts all the same.

But the Old Man got to talking politics with Judge Strong, and they both got so worked up that they hardly knew what was going on.

At all events, the Old Man did not know that Fordham had a horse and wagon at the door, and that he was ordering things enough to break the horse's back, but that was just what he was doing on the strength of his unlimited credit. In fact, he ordered all that Charley had time to put up, and said he would come around for the rest on Monday, and of course it was all right.

And the good Old Man went home that night feeling that he had done his duty to his fellow-man, and naturally slept the sleep of the just, just as he ought to have done. But, indeed, the county fair was the uppermost thing in his mind just then.

The farm was doing wonders, simply off the fertilizers he had put on the year before in such overdoses, and farmers living near him said that he would undoubtedly have the finest corn and potatoes and squashes grown on Long Island.

That was the Old Man's weakness.

Especially corn and squashes.

If he could only best Peter Pad at the fair, there could be no greater happiness for him, especially in squashes.

Peter had taken the prize for years, ever since he got hold of the California mountain squash, and the Old Man had worked his plant from the seeds that he had kindly given him; but if he could only beat him—take the prize away from him—he felt that he would be willing to lie right down and die.

Neither Shorty nor the Kid took any stock in his agricultural enthusiasm, but as there was to be a horse-race at the fair, they made up their minds to be interested in it.

But they didn't enthuse worth a cent when the Old Man showed them the ears of corn, fifteen inches long, big, round and plump, and of which the three wives were very proud, or the mammoth squashes, ripening into yellow gold in the sunshine, or the other vegetables that were certainly of a superior grade.

"N. G.," said Shorty, one day, after the Old Man had been pointing out the squashes that he intended to send to the county fair.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"No good!" put in the Kid.

"Oh, you shut up! What the deuce do *you* know about farming, anyhow?" asked the Old Man.

"Heaps," quietly replied the Kid.

"Well, I should say so."

"Say, dad, N. G.!" said Shorty, again, at the same time shaking his head.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Squashes no good."

"But look at them!"

"No good, dad."

"Oh, you be hanged. I'll take first prize on that yellow beauty," said he, pointing at one that was at least two feet in diameter, full and perfectly grown.

"N. G.—Pete'll be there."

"Peter Pad?"

"Cert. He always harpoons the bun."

"But he will not *this* year. Your old father will be on the ground," said the Old Man, proudly.

"How?"

"With a squash two feet in diameter."

"He'll have one *three*."

"With bright ears of corn, fifteen inches long, twelve perfect rows."

"He'll down it with twenty-inch ears, and fifteen good rows."

"No, sir! And beets weighing five pounds."

"Told me once that he never showed a beet that weighed less'n ten pounds."

"Nonsense. And carrots eighteen inches long! How is that?" he demanded.

"N. G. Pete lost last year on carrots twenty inches long, and he tells me on the strict Q. T. that he's going to splice 'em this year so as to make 'em thirty inches long. Oh, you've got no show alongside of Peter Pad; he's a great farmer."

"Yes, I know it; but how about hens?"

"Oh, he's got hens so big that he has to put their feed on the top of a hogshead, so they won't slobber over themselves when they eat."

"Yes, an' that other brood of his that he has to put napkins on when they eat, they're so dainty," put in the Kid.

"Oh, you fellows be hanged! You never had a good word for me. But I'll bet you a nice wine supper that I take more prizes than he does."

"All right; I hitch on," said Shorty.

"Bet yer a bot. that yer squash isn't anywhere," said the Kid, exultingly.

"I'll take you, young fellow!"

"All right; now we'll see," said Shorty, and this really put an end to the controversy.

But the Old Man was very much in earnest about the coming county fair, because it would be the first one at which he had made a showing of any kind, and he was determined to go in heavy, as he did into everything else.

So he watched the growth and ripening of his crops, out of which he was to select the best specimens wherewith to compete for the prizes, and to make for himself a reputation to be envied.

And Shorty and the Kid talked the matter over occasionally, and considered what *they* would do for the glory of the Shorty farm and the reputation of the Burwick family, and they resolved on doing a few things, at any rate, one of which was to enter the three-in-hand tandem mule team for a prize, and to make a circuit of the race-

course on race day, gotten up in the highest style of English snobbery—Shorty holding the lines as the nabob, and the Kid acting the part of the tiger—in which they calculated on making a hit, and capturing the assembled countrymen; while the women folks were making preparations for a competitive exhibition of flowers, and the results of graftings.

About a month before the fair, at which I was going to exhibit, as usual, I paid a visit to this interesting farm and family, where I found everything lovely, as usual, but nearly all the talk relating to the coming fair.

The Old Man was especially enthusiastic, while I knew by the fun that I saw dancing in the eyes of his son and grandson that they were contemplating some mischief.

He took me all over his farm, which certainly did at that time make an excellent showing, and I could but congratulate him on the improvement over last year.

But his supreme delight seemed to be in his squashes. Whether I had aroused his enthusiasm or not, I will not say, but those squashes were the darlings of his heart, although he had many other cereals to be proud of.

"What do you say to that beauty?" he asked, pointing with pride and enthusiasm to a fine representative of the seeds I had given him.

"It is a beauty indeed," said I.

"Well, I should say so! It is two feet in diameter already, and hasn't done growing yet. That's the king squash of this county, and I'm betting on it. I am going to take it to the fair, and bring back first prize."

"I really hope you will, Mr. Burwick."

"Have you got anything that will down it?"

"Well, I'm afraid not."

"I'll bet you haven't."

"Now if you will allow me to make a suggestion, it will be to the effect that you arrange these three largest squashes to represent the original Shortys."

"How?" he asked, with a half-smile.

"Let this largest one represent yourself, this next in size represent Shorty, and this one that is just a size smaller represent the Kid. How does the idea dawn upon you?"

"Splendidly. It shall be as you suggest, Mr. Pad, and, in fact, as we three stand before them, the public will have no difficulty in recognizing the peculiar fitness of the representation," said he, with considerable enthusiasm.

Before I left I told Shorty of the arrangement, and he suggested certain improvements in the scheme, and also informed me that I would probably see some fun at that coming county fair.

Meantime, the stories so often told at the store, and especially when Shorty was present to encourage them, became a laughing scandal in the village, or at least among the more sober and thinking people, and one night somebody with a paint-pot and marking-brush painted along on the base of the piazza:

"THE CHAMPION LIARS MEET HERE!"

and everybody knew what it meant, of course.

It was rather a scorcher for the old bums and yarn-spinners who had so often been seen there, and although they all knew very well that they were not regarded as Washingtons, they kicked against being thus publicly branded and pointed out.

Shorty had a laugh over the matter, although, in truth, he did not like it very well, for, to say nothing of the reputation of the store, he was afraid it would be the means of driving away the liars, and thereby his fun.

And he was right, for, although he had the lettering painted out, it was more than a week before any two of them would be seen together on that piazza, for fear of being hailed as one of the champion liars.

But this gradually wore away, and both Shorty and the Kid encouraged a resumption of the meetings by their presence, which always included the probability of a drink.

But, strange to say, the very boss liars of the lot were the loudest in denouncing the painted accusation.

"The idea of calling *me* a liar!—*me*, Captain Sheppard Hulse, who's been ter every quarter of the known arth, an' crossed the 'quator twenty-seven times! I tell yer, boys, it's a blamed outrage."

"Wal, now, how much wuss is it than it is on *me*?" asked Bill Jones, indignantly.

"You?" sneered Captain Hulse.

"Yes, *me*."

"Or me," added "Clam" Baylis. "I never told a lie in my life."

"Git out! that's one," said old 'Bluefish.'

"Oh, you stick to yure fish stories; that's all yu can tender," retorted Baylis.

"Wal, I never ketched any b'iled clams, anyway."

"Oh, it's a gosh-darned slander anyhow," said "Shank" Snell, "an' there's no use o' mindin' it."

And this being finally agreed upon, and various threats made as to what they each would do if they only knew the author of the outrage, Shorty put a button on the trouble by treating the entire party to "spirits," and further astonishing them by passing around a box of cheap cigars, after which they all took seats on the piazza again.

Shorty started the ball in motion.

"Now, gents, I'll tell you a fish story," said he.

"Good! good!" they all cried.

"I'll bet yer can't beat old 'Bluefish's' story," suggested "Clam" Baylis.

"I'll bet I can, for mine is a *true* story, and that's what will lay it out cold."

"Wal, I've hearn tell that truth war stranger'n fiction, but git on ter yer course an' give us a specimin," said Captain Hulse.

"Oh, it's a very simple story, not much of a story anyhow, but I'll go through, since I've started. This is a story of trout-fishing, gentlemen," he said, quietly.

The party nudged each other or swopped winks, all of which seemed to say: "Now for the alfiredest lie that ever was heard."

"Well, the scene of the story is on Lake George. I had heard tell of the wonderful catches of trout up there in certain localities, so I provided myself with all the latest improvements in trout-fishing, and started out. On arriving at the lake, I hired a guide to take me to the best known spots. I was bound to astonish my friends in the city, and I did. Well, I cast a fly and waited patiently for a rise. Nary a rise. I fooled around there for half an hour without receiving an indication that there was anything there

but mosquitoes and flies, and of them I got all the bites I wanted. Well, all of a sudden my bob disappeared with a rush. I had hooked a big one and no mistake, so I brushed the mosquitoes out of my eyes and prepared to land him. But this I found to be no easy job."

"I'll warrant yer," put in old "Bluefish."

"I reeled and tugged and pulled until my rod was like a rainbow, and finally, with the assistance of the guide, I landed him. Whew!" and he paused, as though even the recollection of it put him out of breath.

"Great sport that," said old "Bluefish."

"I should say so. Well, gentleman, how much do you suppose that trout weighed?"

"Twenty-five pounds," suggested "Clam" Baylis.

"No."

"Thirty," said "Bluefish."

"No."

"Forty," suggested Cap Hulse.

"Fifty," said Fordham.

"No."

"Sixty," ventured "Shank" Snell.

"No."

"Well, which guesses the nearest?"

"You are all away off," said Shorty.

"Well, seventy-five pounds, then," said Smith.

"No."

They all looked at each other, evidently expecting that he would claim that it weighed a hundred, but none of them ventured to make any further guesses.

"Well, say, was it a trout?" asked Baylis.

"Yes, a genuine lake trout."

Then they looked at each other some more.

"Well, say, how much *did* it weigh anyhow?"

"*Two pounds, ten ounces*," replied Shorty, at the same time blowing a cloud of smoke above his head.

There was a moment's silence, and then that was broken by a loud and prolonged laugh.

"Wal, gosh darn my butes if that arn't the greatest old fish story ever I hearn," said Snell.

"I call it a fish sell."

"Oh, that's no regular fish story," growled "Bluefish."

"Wal, it's good 'nough ter draw ther treats," said Captain Hulse, getting up and starting toward the back room of the store, followed by the others, and don't you forget it.

They laughed and moistened their palates in the regulation country store fashion, after which they took seats on the piazza once more.

The Kid had taken a hand in by this time, having been informed how the game stood.

And after they had chatted awhile, Captain Hulse, on the strength of having treated, which is a big thing for a Long Islander, suggested that they have another fish story, and Bill Jones amended the suggestion, or rather tacked another one on to it, to the effect that it *be* a fish story, and not a fish sell, like the last one.

And then "Shank" Snell suggested that the younger Mr. Burwick (the Kid) try his hand at a story, to see if he could keep up the reputation of the assemblage, and everybody said "Yes."

"Me tell a story! Never told one in my life," said the Kid.

"Well, tell the truth, just for a change."

"Tell something anyhow."

"Make it a fish story," said old "Bluefish," and this seeming to be the sense of the meeting, the Kid seemed to be forced into the breach.

"Now look here, I'm no good. Give yer that for a pointer," said he. "His nibs, here," (pointing to Shorty), "is ther only story teller in ther family."

Cries of "Oh, Oh!"

"Ever heard a story?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ever been fishing?"

"Well, yes," said he, after a pause.

"All right, tell us about it."

"Oh, yer want something sensational?" he asked, looking from one to another.

"Yes, make it hair-liftin'," said Jones, who by this time was feeling ready for anything.

"Well, the only fish story that I can think of relates to a racket we had in New York once."

"All right. Give it to us," said they.

"Nothing very sensational."

"All right. Let her go if she's loaded," said Bill Jones, earnestly.

"Well, how about sharks?" he asked.

"Shirks is good 'nough for me," said old man "Bluefish," for he was some on sharks himself.

"Let her go!" put in Bill Jones.

"Well," began the Kid, "this was about five years ago. Ther sharks had got very thick in New York harbor, and nobody dared to go in swimming unless they had a boiler-iron bathing-suit, and all ther sports united in shark-killing clubs. In fact, no chap as hadn't pulled his 'man-eater' was regarded as any good. Well, twelve of us resolved ter go out on a shark-hunt one day."

"Good boy!" said "Bluefish."

"We engaged a scow an' a tug to go along ter take in our catch."

"Great scheme!" murmured Captain Hulse.

"We had all the modern appliances for shark-catching—livers, steel hooks, everything."

"Good!" ejaculated "Clam" Baylis.

"There was much excitement."

"I should say so!" suggested "Shank" Snell.

"It was spoken of in the papers."

"Of course!" This by all hands, who by this time were well worked up.

"We were to start from Pier No. 1."

"Know it first-rate," muttered Captain Hulse.

"Day appointed, you know."

"Yes."

"Everything ready."

"Yes."

"Livers and steel hooks."

"Yes."

"Barge and steam-tug."

"Yes."

"Great excitement."

"Yes."

"Everybody talking about sharks."

"Yes."

"And clams were a dollar a bushel."

They all said "Yes" again, but what the price of clams had to do with shark-fishing they couldn't see.

"Fifty cents a quart—shelled."

They all said "Yes" again, but in doubt.

"Demand greater than their supply."

"Yes."

"Great excitement, understand."

"Yes."

"Newspapers talkin' 'bout it."

"Yes."

"Well, takin' everything into consideration, we concluded to go clammin'," said the sober little guy, managing to throw his feet upon the railing.

Momentary silence honored the sell.

Finally it was broken.

"Goldarn my skin, but that's a darn sight wuss nor yer father's trout yarn," said Captain Hulse, disgustedly.

"That's a fine shark story," growled "Clam" Baylis.

"Went clammin'!" muttered "Shank" Snell.

"Ther wust I ever heard!" muttered old "Bluefish."

"Well, I told yer that it wasn't much of a fish story," said the Kid.

"Wal, I guess yer was right," said Hulse.

"Always am, cap, on ther square—own part of ther 'Square Store.' See?"

They all said "Yes," but they groaned.

It was evident that there was danger that the reputation of the Liars' Club would suffer, if not become a by-word and a mockery, if this sort of thing went on to any length, and those chronic old liars felt bad. They felt as though they were out of place; as though they had fallen upon evil times and into uncongenial, unappreciative companionship, and they sighed sighs five fathoms deep, and felt as though they wanted to go home and lie to themselves, just for amusement, and to keep their hands in.

At Shorty's suggestion they all went in and partook of some stomach bitters. Then silently and solemnly they went out upon the piazza again.

People who passed the store looked at the liars, and wondered if they had been converted.

Even Captain Hulse seemed to be reflective and down in the mouth.

Old "Bluefish" picked his teeth in silence with a shark's tooth, and Bill Jones held both of his hands between his legs and had a far-away look in his eyes.

"Shank" Snell looked up the road as though he wanted to go home and get into more lively company.

Shorty and the Kid pulled away at their cigars and awaited events.

The Kid had made the hit of the day, and yet he didn't appear to be stuck up about it.

Captain Hulse made a painful attempt to turn the subject into weather, but it was a failure. Nobody appeared to care a snap about the weather.

Finally, Bill Jones felt the spirit move, whether it was the spirit he had got on the outside of, or whether it was the Quaker influence that possessed him, may never be known. But he felt that something ought to be said; that something ought to be done for the reputation of the company.

So after waiting a few minutes, he said:

"Say!"

They all looked at him, but spoke not.

"I think this is a sort of a fool meetin'."

Two or three of them chuckled, but said nothing.

"We've been used ter hearin' stories here."

"That's so," said old "Shank."

"But this has all been foolin'."

"That's so," growled Captain Hulse.

"Guess we'd better go home," said "Bluefish," who was also utterly disgusted.

"Better go an' die," growled "Clam" Baylis.

Then there was more silence.

"Why don't somebody tell a story? Go in, Bill," said Ben Fordham.

"Yes, I'd kinder like ter hear a story," said "Clam."

"Go it, Bill," said Hulse.

This appeared to be popular, and Bill was further urged. Finally he braced himself.

"I arn't much of a story-teller," he began, "but if I couldn't beat ther two last ones I'd go die," and he got more encouragement from this speech.

"I like somethin' wot's got some snap inter it."

"Yes, yes," they all said.

"Somethin' like——" and he hesitated.

Bill was beginning to feel sleepy from the effects of the "stomach bitters" he had taken, as did the others, with the exception of Shorty and the Kid.

But he braced up the best he could, for he still felt that the honor of the company rested on his shoulders.

"Well, what I—I was goin' ter—ter say——" and he seemed to be trying to refresh his memory.

"Yes," suggested Shorty, and one or two of the others said "Yes," just to show they were awake.

"What I was going ter say—'member that story 'bout Hank Hutchings?" he asked.

"No," said Shorty. "Tell it," and as none of the others seemed to object, it appeared to be all right that he should let himself out.

"Well, Hank—Hank Hutchings—he—he used ter, remember, 'Clam?' He used ter—ter—well, he used ter run a packet 'tween here'n New York, Hank did—Cap'n Hank—you 'member him? Well, Cap'n Hank, he—he was great on storms, he—say 'Clam,' 'member him? Well, he—he—— It was very funny! Nezzar heard such funny thing in all my life. Cap'n, he—shay, 'Shank,' you 'member him? Reg'lar old shea-dog—see? Didn't care no more for rain than shine. Reg'lar ole tough cuss. Well, shay, you 'members him, don't yer, 'Clam?' Well, he—he awful funny! Shay 'Shank,' you 'member him? Well, he—he——

* * * he—* * * he——" and there the story ended, for Bill soon fell asleep, and the others, with the exception of Shorty and the Kid, were in the same condition.

They waited a moment, and then stole away from them and entered the store.

Five minutes afterward, Shorty came out with a sign painted on a box-cover, which he put up just over the head of Captain Hulse, which read thus:

"THE LIARS ARE ASLEEP!"

and there that sign hung for an hour, during which time

Shorty and the Kid had skipped home, and nearly all of the village people had passed, taking in both the sign and the truthfulness of it.

Finally, the yells and laughter of the village boys woke first one and then another of them up, but without waiting for any explanation, they each made the best of his way home, until it came to Bill Jones, and finding himself alone, he also started, wondering all the while what it was that he had been dreaming about Hank Hutchings.

Then, when they had all gone, Charley Smith took down the sign, and the rest was memory.

That Liars' Club was disrupted.

Shorty and the Kid had broken its backbone.

The laugh was on them to such an extent that no one of them was seen on that piazza again that year, and there seemed to be danger of its dying out altogether, if, indeed, it had not ended in Bill Jones' fizzle.

But Shorty had enjoyed the best of it, and had drawn out of the members the most tremendous lies that ever had been told, and so he concluded that it was time to break it up. The season was drawing to a close, and he knew that if he should want them next year for his amusement he could easily find them, for they always gravitate to a country store.

Well, about the next thing on the programme for that season was the long talked of County Fair, on which the Old Man's heart was set.

By this time he had gotten everything all ready, and there could be no question but that he had a fine agricultural exhibit.

The "Old Man" Squash was big and golden in its stalwart proportions, and the "Shorty" one was not far behind, while "The Kid" was a beauty, fully sixteen inches in diameter.

And he had corn, potatoes, and other products of his farm in comparative proportions.

The three "Shorty" Squashes had been carefully taken from the vines, and placed in a dry spot where the sun would shine on and give them the finishing touches before they were taken to the Fair.

Shorty and the Kid contemplated them.

They were three beauties and no mistake, but even their golden gloriousness, and the hopes that the Old Man had centered in them, could "down" the mischief in their hearts.

They had a big cannon firecracker left from the Fourth of July hurra.

It was fully two inches in diameter, and eight inches long; a perfect terror.

Shorty and the Kid had planned the thing all out beforehand, and now that the Old Man had got his exhibits into shape for transporting to the scene of his expected triumph, they had a chance to carry out their design.

On top of all three of the squashes there rose a large and well-proportioned stem, and the outward appearances were simply perfection.

But one night Shorty and the Kid went to work on that largest squash.

They did not harm the outward upper appearance of the vegetable, but they carefully and artistically "plugged" it on the under side.

They carefully inserted that big firecracker, and replaced the "plug" so nicely that there was only the slight end of the fuse left outside, and that never would have attracted attention, so artfully was it arranged.

And meanwhile, they appeared to enter into the spirit of the thing with the Old Man and the wives, who were bound to make a hit with their flower exhibit, as they themselves were with their three-in-hand tandem mule team.

Finally the day of the opening arrived, and all of the exhibits were arranged in good season, that representing the Burwick family being especially fine.

The Old Man was as proud as a peacock, and the smiles that illuminated his rubicund mug were sufficient to light up a pumpkin jack-lantern, while the three wives were shedding sunshine on the exhibition by the smiles of their pretty faces. The whole family was pretty well known in the county by this time, and bearing the charmed reputation of being rich, another interest was awakened in them on account of their being amateur or city farmers, taking a genuine interest in agriculture, and exhibiting for the first time.

On this account it was pretty certain that they would obtain a good share of the first prizes. See?

Well, the Fair opened with great *eclat*. The weather was charming, and the attendance larger than it had been before in many years.

And the usual characters seen around country fairs were there in great numbers.

There was the interesting lady selling turned wooden ware, useful and ornamental.

The renowned razor-strop man, who has haunted fairs ever since they were instituted. The pretty lady with all sorts of seeds for sale. The man with marking-plates and indelible ink. The man with fancy soaps and perfumery, made especially for country fairs. The man with big lungs and prize packages, each one of them warranted to contain a prize worth more than the price of the package, to say nothing of the candy. The smooth-voiced man who was selling cement for the mending of broken china. The book-peddler. The man with the patent fly-trap with a mouse-trap combination. The man with the tooth-cleaner. The corn-salve man. The man with toothache drops so potent that you only had to shake the bottle to cure the worst kind of jumping toothache, and goodness only knows how many other things were there for sale.

Shorty and the Kid went around among these people, quietly guying the most of them or playing jokes on others, buying things occasionally that they thought might please the boys at home.

They went to one booth where a man had all sorts of the smaller musical instruments for sale, and would even take orders for pianos and church organs.

Shorty took one instrument after another, as though inspecting it. Finally, the man of instruments thought he had inspected about enough.

"What instrument would you like to buy, sir?"

"Wal," replied Shorty, with a country drawl, "I was sorter lookin' round till I cum across one that I could play."

"Well, you seem to play them all tolerably well. Ever taken musical lessons?"

"No. Lemme see that 'ere fiddle," he added, and the dealer handed it down to him.

"A very fine instrument."

Shorty grinned and tuned it. Then taking the bow, he made that violin fairly howl "Yankee Doodle," drawing around a big crowd of sight-seers, all of whom seemed delighted. Indeed, the dealer was as much so as any of them, for Shorty was not only drawing a crowd, but at the same time he was showing off his instruments advantageously.

The crowd applauded when he had finished, but Shorty took no notice of it. He turned to the Kid.

"My son, du yu think yu could learn tu play this little fife if I should buy it for yu?" he asked, handing him a tin piccolo.

"Don' know, but I'll try," drawled the Kid, and the crowd laughed and concluded that they were a funny little father and son.

"Wal, lemme hear yu try once," and Shorty again took up the violin, and the crowd grinned.

He started in on "The Devil's Hornpipe," while the Kid accompanied him on the little piccolo in such a masterly manner as to astonish not only the dealer but the listening crowd.

Shorty and the Kid were just in their element, for those who remember them in their old successful minstrel days will understand that they could play—well, on nearly every known instrument. Indeed, they were always regarded as musical prodigies, while Shorty himself had been known for years as the king of the banjo.

"Wal, my son, that's purty good. Guess yu might learn tu play in time," said Shorty, after the applause had subsided.

"Buy it for me, pa."

"Hum! lemme see. What's that hangin' up thar?" he asked of the astonished dealer.

"That, sir, is a banjo," said he, handing it down.

Shorty took it, and looked it over. It wasn't much of a banjo, but he knew he could play it for all there was in it, so he commenced to tune it, and the crowd surged thicker and thicker around the booth.

"Soy, pop, buy me this little drum," said the Kid, taking up a tamborine, while Shorty was getting the banjo into condition.

The crowd laughed, for they knew very well that the instrument was not a drum, and it pleased them to see him look it over, shake the bells, and tap it inquiringly.

"Oh, what's a drum good for?" asked Shorty.

"Wal, it'll sorter jine in," replied the Kid, and they were both of them doing some fine acting.

"Let's see if it will," said Shorty, striking up a lively plantation breakdown, to the utter amazement of the spectators, who regarded them as simply a pair of novices.

It was the same piece they had played a thousand times together on the same instruments to admiring audiences, and they were of course perfectly at home, but that instrument dealer and that crowd was all broken up. They had never heard such playing before in their lives, and they applauded wildly.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said the dealer. "Who in thunder might you be?"

"We're farmers," replied Shorty, handing him back the banjo.

"And never took lessons?"

"No."

"Well, that beats me."

"Wish I could find somethin' I could play on," said Shorty, looking wistfully around.

The crowd roared with laughter, and as more were surging up every moment, it was plain to be seen that this had been made the center of attraction.

"Guess you have been guying me," said the dealer, "but I'm much obliged to you all the same. Call again," he added, as Shorty and the Kid made a movement to break through the crowd and get away.

I had been watching them from the start, knowing, of course, just what they were up to, and on breaking away they discovered and approached me.

"Hello, Pete! Give us yer fin," said Shorty, and while I was shaking with one hand the Kid got the other.

"Well, how are you, boys? I see you are up to your old guying games again," said I, laughing.

"Got ter do somethin' ter stir 'em up. Seen ther Old Man?"

"Oh, yes; he's busy inside, lugging everybody he can get hold of up to see his squashes and corn."

"Oh, he'll go off his nut, sure, before this thing breaks up. Done nothing but talk about it for the last month," said Shorty.

"That's all right; let him enthuse. He is the happiest man in the place. Go and see him."

"All right. See you some more lately, Peter," and the little jokers started to hunt up their dad.

That instrument-dealer knew he had been sold by those two runts, but he wanted to know how badly, and seeing them in conversation with me, he asked me who they were.

"That was the original Shorty and his son, the Kid, as they are familiarly known—otherwise, George and Charley Burwick, musical wonders of the minstrel stage a few years ago, now retired and living on one of the best farms in the county," said I.

"That's it, by gracious! Why, I have heard of them hundreds of times, also of their pranks; now I have seen one of them, and a good one it was," said he.

And the crowd got hold of it, the younger portion of whom knew them well by reading so much of them, and I soon found that I had done them anything but a kindness in telling who they were, for they were followed continually from that time forth.

On arriving at the place assigned the Old Man for his exhibit, they found him employed very much as I had told them he was; talking with everybody and telling them what he knew about farming, his bald, round head and face shining with perspiration, and being known as a rich man, he was, of course, the center of general attention.

It was the first time Shorty or the Kid had seen the Old Man's exhibits, or their wives, and they were surprised to find how really good they were, and they almost repented having "fixed" that big squash.

By the way, they found the three squashes, ranged from largest to smallest, and each a fine specimen, neatly label-

ed "The Old Man," on the largest, "Shorty," on the next in size, and "The Kid" on the smallest. Only a few, however, knew the real significance.

"That's Peter Pad's handwriting," said Shorty, and laughing, they walked away, taking in the different exhibits of the show until they came to the floral department, where they found their wives hovering around to hear the comments on their flowers and rare graftings, which, however, were all favorable.

"I really hope, George, that you two fellows will do nothing to mar the success of our exhibit," said Shorty's wife.

"What! Well, I like that," said he, turning away.

"Oh, you needn't get mad, for I feel it in my bones that you will be cutting up some prank or other."

"That's all right, ma. But I want you to tog yourself for the drive round the race-course to-morrow, and don't you get any grease on your memory."

"An' I want yer ter tog yerself up high, girly, an' posture ter admire yer husband in his great tiger act on the same occasion," said the Kid to his wife, and then they walked away, leaving them to laugh, as they always had to, over their quaint sayings.

And so the first day of the fair came to a close, everything successful, and everybody delighted. Of course, a great many returned home, but the large majority remained for the second and last day, which was to include the horse-trot.

This brought out many sports and lovers of horses, who cared nothing for the agricultural part of the show, together with several English coaches, and quite a number of dog-carts, with tandem teams and tigers. This was to be a big show for the countrymen, as these turn-outs were to drive around the course to display their style, and Shorty was having his mules fixed up very fine.

The judges of the fair had attended to their duties, and the awards were to be announced after the races, and in which, of course, the Old Man was more directly interested than in anything else.

There was again a great crowd in the main building inspecting the exhibits, and as it was known that the judges had already passed sentence, there was, of course, much speculation, and not a little betting, on the result.

The Old Man was as full of it as he was the day before, and bantered me very hard regarding which of us would take first prize on corn and squashes.

His enthusiasm brought a large number of people around his exhibit, and among the crowd I once caught a glimpse of the Kid.

It was an hour yet before the races.

The crowd was great, and good nature sat smilingly on every face. There were country belles and beaux, sauntering hand in hand, or working their way through the throng, and there were city swells with their belles and fashionable clothes, so that the assemblage was made up of all sorts, but all in good humor, especially our friend, the Old Man, who was cock sure of getting first prize.

Suddenly there was a dull explosion that startled everybody, and some of the crowd were hit with something, and swore they were shot.

There was intense excitement, and a cloud of gunpowder

smoke, which led everybody to believe that something terrible had happened, but when the smoke cleared away and no blood was seen, only faces and clothes spattered with squash, they proceeded to make an investigation.

The scattered remains of the Old Man's big squash told the story. It had exploded.

The poor old fellow was wild about it.

Who had done it—how had it happened, anyway? It was undoubtedly the work of some rival, and I half believe that the Old Man suspected me, and does to this day, of blowing up his big squash.

The excitement quickly subsided, and was revived again in the shape of laughter and indignation.

The managers at once consulted, and offered a reward of fifty dollars for the author of the outrage, and although I felt certain that I could put my hand on them, I said nothing, and let the thing work.

But the announcement of the horse-race soon caused the explosion to be forgotten, and everybody made a rush for the grand stand.

Whether the Old Man went or not I do not know, but I suspect he was helping clean up the scattered remains of his mammoth squash, and trying to get at the mystery attending its disruption, for he told me afterward that he found fragments of a huge firecracker freely mingled with the wreck of the squash, and it must have been while the races were going on that he was thus employed.

But the races were the great attraction just then, of course, and all else was forgotten.

They were eminently successful, and then everybody looked for the afterpiece—the parade.

Shorty was out, and all ready. His wife was dressed in the latest and showiest, and he was gotten up in exaggeration of the swell Anglomaniac snobs who were doing the "English, yer know," while the Kid took the cake in his smart get-up and uniform of the regulation tiger.

There wasn't a handsomer dog-cart on the ground, nor a finer set of harness than he showed, and yet everybody could see that the sober-looking little runt was simply burlesquing the la-de-da swells.

He watched his opportunity while the line was being formed, and got right in behind a blooming heavy swell with a dog-cart and a pair of elegant horses in tandem, together with a tiger who was intended to paralyze the natives and arouse the envy of his fellow-servants.

And finally the swell review was all in motion, and a great parade of fancy teams it was, ranging from the huge English drag and coach to the village-cart and pony.

But Shorty took the cake.

As the smart procession pranced around the race-course, he was the observed of all observers, and finally cheer upon cheer swelled up as he made his mulish but triumphant circuit of the course.

Yes, he yanked the bun, and the swells drove off in disgust, vowing they would never take part in another fair if those little rascals were to be allowed to take part in it.

But Shorty didn't care a continental whether they did or not. He knew that he had ten friends to their one on the grounds, and that he had had all the fun he wanted in going them one better and downing them on the tandem racket.

Well, after the excitement was all over, the crowd surged back into the main building, where the whole busi-

ness was to be brought to a close by the announcement of the rewards.

Shorty and the Kid kept in the background and out of the crowd, which pushed and elbowed each other in getting nearer to the judge's stand, but they listened attentively to the reading of the awards, for they expected an "honorable mention" themselves for their mules.

Now, whether it was in revenge for the outrage that had been played on the Old Man, or whether he really did have the finest exhibit, I will not say, but he was awarded first prize for squashes, corn, grapes, wheat, barley, and oats.

The other prizes were scattered pretty evenly about, the three Mrs. Burwicks receiving two or three for their flowers and graftings; and this made the Old Man so happy that he forgot all about the explosion of his squash, and wanted to embrace everybody.

The reading of the awards and "honorable mentions" went on, and in the department of domestic animals George Burwick received first prize for well-broken mules, driven in team.

And so the long-expected event came to a close, general satisfaction being felt all around, and even more than that by the youngsters who had seen the celebrated trio, the Old Man, Shorty, and the Kid.

The next day they were all at home again, as happy as ever in their lives.

As for Shorty and the Kid, while talking over the explosion of the big squash, they would have it that it caused the Old Man to get the first prize, for had it not occurred to awaken sympathy, he would have received no prize at all, not even second.

They even had the cheek to say as much to him.

"Well, soy, what was der matter with yer old pumpkin, anyhow?" asked the Kid. "It got ter feeling so big that it swelled up an' bust, didn't it?"

"Oh, that's all right, my Kid. That pumpkin, as you call it, took first prize, don't forget that," said he.

"But it's a lucky thing it bust," said Shorty.

"Why so?"

"Because if it hadn't yer'd got no prize."

"Soy, it wasn't ther squash he got ther prize for anyway," continued the Kid.

"What was it for?"

"His patent squash-buster."

"Oh, you fellows may chaff now all you like; I've taken more prizes than Peter Pad did, and that reminds me of a few little bets that I have won from you fellows."

That was so. The Old Man was in luck all around, and believing that the explosion in reality was the occasion of it, those young roosters felt rather sick when they paid their bets.

If true it was, they were hoist by their own petard.

But they consoled themselves by recounting and dwelling upon the fun they had enjoyed, as well as the tandem honors they had received, at the fair.

Of course, it soon became known all over Little Neck what honors had been reaped for its reputation, and the Old Man received congratulations from his neighbors on every hand, and which caused him to mentally resolve that he would take every prize given next year.

"What was it about that squash bustin'?" asked Captain Hulse of Shorty, the next time they met.

"Oh, that was only an oversight," replied Shorty.

"An oversight! What in thunder der yer mean?" demanded the puzzled old salt.

"Why, the Old Man forgot to bore a hole in it."

"What did he want a hole for?"

"For vent."

"Git out!"

"Cert. You see, it was one of those explosive squashes that get up steam when they ripen; and if there isn't a hole bored in them, just before they are dead ripe, they bust all up."

Shorty said this with a face as straight and as sober as

a judge. The captain looked at him, but could see no evidences of guilt or weakening. Then he drew a long breath and started away.

"I'd bet that's ther goshdarndest lie that ever was told," and then he walked indignantly away.

Shorty retired, laughing.

The Liars' Club was not dead yet.

But it was soon all forgotten, the same as all little events are, and everything moved along smoothly in the village, and also on the Burwick farm.

The Old Man was busy, and chuck full of enthusiasm, while harvesting his crops. Everything "turned out" splendidly, and there was a surplus above what would be wanted until crop time came again, which Pat was instructed to send to the New York market when prices were the highest. Altogether, it had been a glorious year for the Old Man, and he made extensive preparations for holding a Thanksgiving feast that should do honor to his success, and credit to his moral and patriotic sentiments of Puritan descent.

As for Shorty and the Kid, they put in most of their time shooting quail and other game. That was all the harvest they wanted. But the Old Man could never be persuaded to take a gun in his hand after the terrible sells and experiences attending their hunting excursion to the Catskill Mountains ("Shortys out Hunting.") That cured him, and he could not bear the smell of powder thereafter.

Bright and beautiful October was drawing to a close. The trees were dressed in glorious garbs of yellow, red, and russet. The apple-trees, heavily laden with their ripe treasures of gold and red, made glad the heart and the eye on every side. Glorious month of harvest!

They all three frequently talked about their store, and what was best to do with it. The Kid suggested that they take it to New York with them.

"I'll tell you what I have been thinking of," said Shorty—"of making the whole business a present to Charley Smith; that is, the stock and good-will."

"My idea exactly!" exclaimed the Old Man.

"He has run the business faithfully, and followed instructions to the letter. It will be of no use to us while we are in the city, and so I think it will be the best thing we can do to turn the whole business over to him, and give the young fellow a start in life."

"I'm agreed," said the Kid.

"So am I. That's what we will do, boys. It will be setting a good example and giving him a start in life. I'm glad you agree with me."

"All right."

"Let her go!"

"But I shall have to tell him about it myself, for he would never believe either one of you fellows. So I'll draw up a bill of sale of the stock, and in consideration of one dollar, sell him the whole thing."

"Well, soy, what yer goin' ter do with that dollar?" asked the Kid, seriously.

"Buy firecrackers with it," said the Old Man, giving them a knowing look of suspicion.

And so it was arranged and carried out.

The noble festival of Thanksgiving was celebrated gloriously, and not a poor person was there within their knowledge that was not made the recipient of something to be thankful for, and as for Charley Smith, his gift nearly took his breath away. Indeed, the Old Man was right, for he would never have believed it had he not made the presentation and conducted the whole business himself.

Well, the days were fast getting shorter and colder. The beauty of the country had departed, and the long shadows were fringed with frost, so the Burwick family again packed off for their city home in New York, leaving everything, as before, in charge of Pat.

And thus ends our last entertainment, with this interesting family, in connection with "THE SHORTYS' COUNTRY STORE."

[THE END.]

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